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Vol 6 Don't Tell Me This Is the True History of the Three Kingdoms!

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Translated by [Asd398](#)

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Chapter 1: Don't tell me this is my farewell with Yuan Shao (1)

Liu Bei POV

It's been a week since the Battle of Guandu concluded. The flames of war have long since died down and seem only like a dream now. That's not to say that the Battle of Guandu didn't leave any aftereffects. It just seemed like it left less than I expected.

And right now, as the advance base for the war, Liyang city has lost its purpose and the troops have also shed away their bloodlust and hostility. Rather than being concerned about the outcome of the war, the ordinary citizens who were conscripted were naturally elated at its conclusion.

Within the city, you could see people already beginning to pack. All they lacked was an order from Ben Chu to return to their hometowns.

Of course, there were casualties and those who were grievously wounded. And so, much crying and shouts could be heard throughout the encampment these past few days. Every time I heard anguished cries, I would always get goosebumps. Such sounds were clearly rare in my era.

If the family of deceased soldiers knew that their loved ones died on a battlefield and all they received were a muddled mess of flesh, blood and bone, what would they feel?

I didn't dare to imagine such a scene.

But perhaps this was something normal for this era. The people are probably desensitised to troubled times, hardship and the like. I'd thought that I had grown numb to fighting and killing but I still couldn't get used to it after all. The smell of blood and the sight of gore covering the ground kept coming back to me and triggered sharp nauseous feelings.

Because of this, I rarely left my tent these few days. There was hardly anything urgent going on after all, and even if there were, I wouldn't be the decision maker anyway.

Oh by the way, I'm currently alone now in my tent.

After getting permission from Ben Chu, Zi Long started recruiting troops in Hebei. Using her words: My naivety is on the level of a plant. As Imperial Uncle, if I do not wish to serve under others and create a domain of my own, then recruiting my own troops is of critical importance since nothing else can be done without troops.

Though she confidently promised to return with a large number of troops, I honestly doubt she can raise a significant army in a short time using the reputation of an unknown person like me.

On the other front, Gong You was helping me gather information on Yun Chang, Yi De and the rest.

Since our situation has stabilised now, it's time we focused on finding them.

"My lord, 100-man general Chen is up to no good again!" Just then, a female soldier under my command came in and delivered a report about some issue that cropped up.

"Ah? Ah, I got it, I'll come and see what's up immediately."

Because Zi Long wasn't around, the responsibility of dealing with military affairs has fallen to me. Honestly, my ability to deal with such matters is even below my ability to deal with administrative work.

Zi Long, please come back quick. Before you can raise an army, we might lose the troops we have now.

"Yo, how've you been these few days?" The curtains parted and an elegant voice came from outside.

The owner of the voice had long, golden hair, wore an elegant and exquisite pink gown on her, and had golden silk shoes with thick soles; looking very quaint overall. Looking at her from top to toe, one could tell she wasn't an ordinary person.

"Ah, Ben Chu. You've come." I said as I stood up to receive her.

"You don't need to get up." Ben Chu waved her hand as she looked at me, "I don't have any particular reason for coming here. I just wanted to see you. I've been busy all this while with other things after all."

Though Ben Chu has been very busy these few days, it looks like she has finally gotten a chance to wind down a bit. She looks the same as before but I could tell that she was a lot more approachable.

This was probably thanks to the Battle of Guandu.

As I looked at Ben Chu, who was inspecting the tent as she came in, I couldn't help but think about how her fate could have been.

By right, the Battle of Guandu should have ended in defeat for Ben Chu, and she should have died in despair after falling gravely ill while she retreated. I never imagined that Ben Chu would be so energetic now, after the battle, and she's even changed. And as I said before, I never imagined that the fierce and ambitious nemeses, Yuan Shao and Cao Cao, would be going to Court together.

"So shabby~" Ben Chu concluded after she had fully inspected the tent.

I don't deny that. "I'm a man after all, what else could I possibly need?"

By this reply, I meant that everything I needed couldn't be found in this era.

Leaving aside everything that requires electricity, just reading alone is a pain in this era.

Firstly, I'm not used to holding a bamboo scroll. Secondly, I can't really read what's written. Gong You had read a scroll to me before and I did find the contents interesting but I can't possibly keep troubling her to read to me.

The only things in this tent that I can call my belongings are the twin swords. They were too heavy for me half a year ago but I've gotten used to them by now, and can even fight effectively with them.

I'm not bragging but I feel like my physical capabilities have strengthened while I'm in this era. Though I still can't quite match up to the named generals.

"But there should be some decorations after all..." Ben Chu opined as she supported her breasts with her arms and pointed at my table, "You could make it a little more lively and colourful about the tent and the table."

"I'm fine with this." What's up with Ben Chu today? All she's been talking about are such trivial things. "I'm quite surprised you came to see me today. Shouldn't you be busy with packing up as well?"

I'm not too sure but the commanders should be just as busy as the rank-and-file with other procedures and administrative work. So it's strange that she has the time to come and visit me now.

"What is this huh~" Ben Chu was clearly unhappy when she heard my words and pursed her noble lips as she pointed down at me, "As the descendent of a noble and illustrious family, and as General-in-Chief, I've come to see what it's like for the common people. Yet, not only have you spurned my goodwill, you dare to be so rude!"

"No no no, I don't mean that at all..." I stammered as I frantically pushed Ben Chu's finger to the side as I tried to explain myself.

"Hmph!" Ben Chu retracted her finger and twisted her slim waist and turned away, "I actually wanted to chat with you for a bit before I leave for Xuchang but look at the attitude you're showing me."

Oh? That's all? You just wanted to chat with me?

"I was just surprised, that's all." I smiled helplessly and went behind the table to take some tea leaves that Gong You had bought before, "If it's just to chat, I am of course more than happy to."

"Ah, you don't need to make tea. I'll be leaving soon." Ben Chu stopped me, and swept her outer coat and sat down on my wooden bed, "Another 3 relatives have come to join me over these couple of days so I have to entertain them later."

Seeing that Ben Chu didn't want tea, I kept the tea leaves and sat on a small stool beside the bed.

Relatives huh? It's clear that they came to ride on the back of Ben Chu's success.

"Are you close with them?"

"No, not really. They're just children after all."

And they're still kids huh...

"You don't need to entertain such opportunistic relatives."

"I can't do that. Whether or not I'm close to them, they're family after all. Now that I have achieved success, it's normal for them to join my side."

As she finished, Ben Chu placed her hands close to the brazier beside the bed. Ben Chu's hands were very white and looked bright red under the light of the fire. Her hands were also slightly stiff from the cold, probably because they were exposed for a long time. The reason why they were exposed was probably because she had to attend to administrative work.

"When does Ben Chu intend to head to Xuchang?"

"Tomorrow."

"So suddenly?"

"Un, I stalled for time at the beginning because I thought that Meng De would up to something funny on her side but she actually prepared everything to receive me so quickly." Ben Chu's eyes were alit with rage as she said so, probably unhappy at how swift Meng De acted and felt that she had lost out to Meng De again.

"But whatever it is, Ben Chu has finally fulfilled her wish right."

"Eh? Why's that?" Ben Chu was surprised at my comment.

"As the descendent of the Yuan family, whose forebears all held the 3 Excellency positions for 4 generations, wasn't it Ben Chu's wish to directly support the Son of Heaven in a similar position?"

"Un... I guess you're right." Ben frowned as she considered what I said for a moment before smiling in agreement, "Now that you mentioned it, perhaps it's best if I can get to Xuchang as soon as possible. That way, I can get a grasp of Meng De's movements earlier and prevent her from doing anything funny." Ben Chu seemed to be in high spirits as she said so and began cackling.

But this way, Meng De and Ben Chu will be 2 strong opposing factions in Xuchang, seeing as they both have outstanding warrior generals and administrative officials.

But why did Meng De choose to settle things this way? She was clearly in the position to make a decision that would have led to a better outcome for her side.

"Aiya aiya, I came here to have a relaxing chat with Xuan De but we ended up talking about such serious matters." Ben Chu shook her head as she realised what we'd been talking about and got up and walked over to where I was.

She bent down and touched her forehead to mine. Because her gown wasn't figure hugging, it sagged when she bent down, revealing her mountainous cleavage right before me.

"U, umm..."

"Xuan De, I'll never forget the debt I owe to you for the Battle of Guandu." Ben Chu smiled. This smile was different from the usual elegant smile, and exuded shyness and warmth. "I swear by my lineage that I will repay this debt one day. As long as you have need of me, come hell or high water, I, Yuan Shao Yuan Ben Chu, will do anything to assist you." Ben Chu got up when she finished.

"I, I didn't do anything..." I stammered shyly as I waved my hands. I really didn't think that I did anything that was worth having Ben Chu swear to help me at any cost.

But Ben Chu clearly wasn't of the same opinion as I.

"No, Xuan De taught me a lot of things, and helped me realise a lot of things as well." Ben Chu said in a serious tone, and placed her palm on her chest before she continued, "Perhaps if I hadn't spoken with you back then, my fate now would be very different."

Chapter 2: Don't tell me this is my farewell with Yuan Shao (2)

After a few days, Zi Long returned to Liyang in a Roman-like triumphus fashion. Before she even reached the city, she'd sent a courier ahead who was in very high spirits, which made me guess that Zi Long must have achieved much in her recruitment efforts. And so, I went out to wait for her return with high expectations.

As I looked down from the city tower, Zi Long's shiny armour caught my eye. Just as eye-catching was her confident smile, and the massive crowd behind her.

Just like that, the troops under my command have increased by more than 1,000.

I was still in disbelief and asked Zi Long how she did it, but all she said was that she did it the usual way. Honestly, I'm really surprised at the outcome. I never thought that a new faction like mine with no money, reputation or authority could gather so many people just by Zi Long's efforts alone. I wonder if I was just underestimating myself or if Zi Long's tongue was simply too glib.

But it does make sense if you think about it in the context of this era, where gender equality has been in place since the Shang dynasty and armies have both men and women. In this way, recruiting 1 spouse might net you the other or even the whole family. Even though they will be constantly on the move, being able to live, and die, together might be something comforting in such troubled times.

After all 1,500 or so of my troops were gathered before me, I delivered a speech to them much like how I did back in Zhuo commandery. For some reason, hope seems to be a fresh concept to them and they liked it very much, seeing as they were all in high spirits by the end of it. Of course, guilt assailed me as always seeing them so excited at my words.

"Won't Xuan De command the troops himself?" Zi Long asked me, at which sweat streamed down my face as I smiled stiffly and couldn't reply.

Me command troops? I'd rather handle military affairs. Even though I delivered the speech to them, I still decided to leave the command to Zi Long. I'm not someone like Han Xin who can come up with strategies and tactics with any number of troops after all.

And a few more days after that, Gong You returned.

When she came back, she was clearly utterly exhausted. Her expression seemed the same as how it usually was but one could tell that she was devoid of strength. Leaving aside everything else, Gong You's eyebags were dark. She probably hasn't had much sleep these few days.

When I saw this, I hurriedly got a cup of tea for Gong You.

"M, my lord..."

"Don't say anything, have a seat first." Gong You's expression wavered when she saw me bring tea to her but I stopped her and made her sit down first.

"Hu~," Gong You let out an uncharacteristic sigh and crumpled onto a nearby chair. She saluted me and received the tea with trembling hands which she sipped, and then quickly set down her cup, "... My lord, General Guan Yu seems to have left Xuchang."

"Eh? Already?"

"Un." Gong You nodded, "It seems like they left soon after we told them of our whereabouts before the Battle of Guandu began."

"Then what about now? Where are they now?" My voice grew louder as I got more agitated at Gong You's words.

"I don't have concrete information on their present whereabouts." Gong You shook her head, and nodded resolutely immediately after as she continued, "But I am sure that General Guan Yu and the rest are headed for the southern most city in Lord Yuan Shao's domain, Runan."

Runan... It's somewhere at the border of Ben Chu's territory right.

"Then have you heard any news about Yi Dr?"

"... I regretfully apologise." Gong You tried to get up and bow in apology but I hurriedly grabbed her arms to stop her as she had already done everything she could.

"Rest easy first Gong You. I'll take care of everything else for now and we can think of that later." At this moment, I was more concerned about Gong You. She's always been serious about her work to a fault, and doesn't take care of herself enough. It is especially so for missions of critical importance that her actions can be dangerous to herself.

"My lord, I suggest that we should start moving immediately and head to Runan first before eventually heading further south."

"Eh?

Just then, Gong You grabbed on to my sleeve and looked at me. The seriousness in her eyes was even more pronounced because of her tiredness and this gave me a shock.

"Lord Yuan Shao has not said it yet, but she probably intends to have you follow her to Xuchang. The only reason why she hasn't mentioned it is because she hasn't made the necessary arrangements. If we wish to eventually build a domain of our own, we cannot stay in Hebei which has now stabilised and must reunite with the other generals as soon as possible and travel further south..."

Gong You finished saying what would have been equivalent to a week's worth of words for her in 1 breath. Clearly, she was very serious about it. The hands she held me tightly with

were shaking, and it felt like she could pass out in the next second. But even so, she still looked at me with resolute eyes, in the hope that I could make a decision here and now.

Could it be because she has detected a sense of comfort in my heart? A sense of comfort in the days I've spent here, that has led to thoughts that maybe going on like this wouldn't be too bad after all.

Of course, waiting here for Yun Chang and the rest was an option, but it was a coward's choice, and I would never amount to anything if I stayed. As Liu Bei, I can't stop here.

"Un, Gong You, I understand."

"My lord?"

I caressed Gong You's pale cheeks. Her cheeks were smooth back in Xu state but after all she'd been through, there were cuts and dust on them.

"Gong You, it's been really hard on you."

"... No, this is my duty, and I should be doing this much at least." Gong You did not complain at all. How is someone as weak and useless as me worthy of such loyalty?

Yes, I need to bid farewell with Ben Chu soon.

Later on I went to find Zi Long to explain what I'd decided but who knew that Gong You had already discussed this with Zi Long beforehand and everyone was already packed up and ready to leave Liyang anytime.

In that case, there's nothing more to say.

On the way to Ben Chu's tent, I happened to bump into Xu You who was just coming out and said hi to her. Xu You was the same as always, and wore many layers of clothing. Her existence felt stronger now, but not by much.

"Because Ben Chu is going to Xuchang, I'm following as well. We 3 are going to be together again, hehehe~" Xu You was truly happy, and her laughter felt like it came from the bottom of her heart.

From what I know, Xu You doesn't meet a good ending at all in actual history. Not only does Xu You have a reputation for being a traitor, his way of doing things is seen as audacious. I really wonder what exactly changed to have brought about such a drastic change in character?

But perhaps, that's how she really is.

To loosen up my tense feelings, I tried to think about various other things and entered Ben Chu's tent.

“Is it Xuan De?” Ben Chu called out to me even though she still had her back to me.

She was currently wearing a plain white robe, which looked like it was pretty cooling. It seems like fabric in this era is a little thin as many important parts of Ben Chu’s gorgeous figure could be seen behind the translucent robe, making her even more alluring and I really didn’t know where to look.

“Un, I’ve come.” I saluted in reply.

“Why is Xuan De being so formal? It’s unlike you.” Ben Chu said as she grabbed 2 wine cups and made to pour wine for the both of us.

“You don’t come here often so we should have a good drink when we have the chance.”

“Ah, about that, I’m not here to drink with you.” Seeing that the situation was fast becoming complicated, I stopped her and took a deep breath before I continued, “I came here today as I have something important to tell you.”

“... Is that so.” Ben Chu said, as her elegant smile began to look a little stiff.

Just as I was about to continue, Ben Chu spoke up first.

— Are you going to head south?

Chapter 3: Don't tell me this is my farewell with Yuan Shao (3)

Shiku~ Ben Chu sat on a plain cushion that didn't seem very thick with her legs stretched out. She held a golden wine cup in her left hand and fiddled with the pattern of the wooden floor boards with her right. She did not continue from where she left off, and only sipped her wine.

"Ben Chu, I..."

"No, no need to say any further." Ben Chu shook her head, and instead of anger, she calmly smiled, "I've already guessed that you would leave sooner or later since Xuan De doesn't have a reason to stay here after all."

Ben Chu twirled her index fingers about her wine cup and rocked her body back and forth as she said so, and was clearly on the verge of throwing a tantrum like a kid.

Though I felt troubled by this, I still kept my mind on business and nodded, "The whereabouts of 2 little sisters are still unclear so I must go and search for them. I'm afraid I can't go with Ben Chu to Xuchang."

"I haven't even asked you to follow me but you've already rejected me huh." Ben Chu smiled bitterly but it seems like she expected this as she nodded before she continued, "Un, this is something that can't be helped."

She downed the rest of her wine and gave a 'Ha~' before she kept the wine cup, as though she was trying to convince herself to accept it.

"But even if I'm not here, Ben Chu shouldn't have much trouble. You have many capable retainers and brave generals by your side who can contribute far more than I can."

Gong You had said that Ben Chu wanted me to follow her into Xuchang and it seems like she did have that intent but I really can't quite understand why.

If you told me she wanted Zi Long or Gong You to stay then I can understand why since they're talented individuals after all. But me? When it comes down to it, there really isn't anything that I've done which can't be done by someone else so I don't see how Ben Chu would want me to stay.

But when she heard my words, Ben Chu's face turned cold instantly and she stared daggers at me at which I didn't know where to look and could only lower my head.

Did I say something wrong?

"Xuan De, you may not have realised it yet but there's something you have in you which makes you surpass everyone else." Ben Chu said as she slowly pointed at me, "And it is that something which can make you gather many about you."

When did I ever acquire such a power?

"You don't believe it?" Ben Chu's expression remained serious as she said so when she saw my self-abasing smile.

"And so, what is this something that makes me surpass everyone?"

"..." Ben Chu sank into silence and only stared at me for a few seconds before she started laughing, "Hahaha!"

"What are you laughing about?"

"No, I just think that if I were to verbalise it, everything would become weird. No, it's more accurate to say that it is I who will become weird."

Un? I really don't get it.

After she laughed for a while, Ben Chu's expression returned the calm one at the start. I don't what went on inside her head but it seems like things are alright now.

"Come to think of it, you should be busy with packing on your side right? Why don't I send some help over?"

"Oh, that's alright, I can't possibly impose any further on Ben Chu."

"No, this is something I should do." As she finished, Ben Chu got up and slowly walked over to the entrance of the tent. I don't know what she has in mind but I just followed for the time being.

Ben Chu parted the curtains and let in a ray of sunshine which shone on Ben Chu's face and made her squint.

"Perhaps Xuan De is like this ray of sunshine." Ben Chu said. I didn't understand what she meant and only nodded in response.

And so, for the next 2 days, we were occupied with packing. Gong You was still a little apprehensive of Ben Chu at first but the troops she sent over to help us did indeed help us plenty so Gong You stopped suspecting Ben Chu.

And on the 3rd day, we decided to set off.

Whether it was I or Gong You, leaving Liyang seemed almost too easy but there really wasn't anything that was worthy of suspicion.

Ben Chu really was letting us go.

When we left, Ben Chu came to send us off along with Yuan Shu whom we haven't seen for a while now, as well as her strategists and generals. Not everyone seemed dismayed that we

were leaving but they were all solemn at least and this was something I didn't expect.

"I don't know when we will meet again after this parting. I hope Xuan De doesn't forget our promise."

That promise is probably the favour that Ben Chu owes me.

"Un, if I ever need help, I'll find Ben Chu." I don't actually feel like she owes me anything, nor do I intend on calling on the favour but I said as much anyway as it would make her feel easier.

Wu. The sound of hesitant swallowing of air came from behind Ben Chu. When I looked closer, I saw Yuan Shu's little head poking out from Ben Chu's side. She was holding on to Ben Chu's long skirt with a somewhat angry expression.

"I'll be seeing you again then, Lord Yuan Shu."

"... Hmph!" Yuan Shu hesitated for a long while before she turned her head away and muttered softly, "You could have just stayed here. Why do you have to leave huh?"

"Gong Lu~" Ben Chu chided Yuan Shu and bade her not to say any further. Yuan Shu gave an "Wu~" and frowned.

"I, Liu Bei, will be leaving now. I hope I get to meet Lords Yuan Shao and Yuan Shu again one day!" I felt like regret could sprout in my heart anytime now so I saluted and made to leave immediately.

Ben Chu gave a long helpless sigh as she folded her arms below her breasts and smiled as she looked at me.

And then she suddenly came up close and before I realised what was happening, she placed her lips onto my cheeks.



“Big sister is so cunning~”

“Hahaha, Imperial Uncle is so lucky!”

“My lord, y-y-you should have kiss him where there's no one around... Ju Shou stop pulling me!”

I seemed to have caught a glimpse of Xu You doing a cheering pose at the side.

At this, I was really at a loss and didn't know what to say. Ben Chu looked at me and smiled before saluting, “... Xuan De! I'll see you again then!”

As we left Liyang, I kept turning back to take a look and only gave up after Liyang city was no longer in sight.

We'd only just left but I was already missing Ben Chu and the rest. This was probably the effect of that kiss.

"Xuan De, can you stop looking so lifeless?"

"Eh?" I only realised that I was making such a face when Zi Long told me, "Ah, that's embarrassing."

I hurriedly shook my head and stopped thinking about unimportant things.

"... It was just a kiss to the cheek." Gong You said this in a chilly tone as she rode on my other side.

"Gong You, give me a break." It wasn't much but I still felt happy about it.

Could it be that... Ben Chu likes me?

No no no, impossible. She probably just wanted to prank me and I let her get away with it in front of everyone.

"Hai~ I really have no luck with women huh~" I sighed as I said so. For all 18 years of my life, I've mostly concentrated on studying and haven't had much interaction with girls. Even if I have had a lot of interaction in this era, romantic experiences might be too high a hurdle for me.

"... You're so blockheaded that it makes one mad."

"Un? Gong You, did you say something?"

"... Selective hearing."

"No, I really didn't hear what you just said because of the horse..."

I seemed to have said something wrong as Gong You was actually frowning and pouting angrily.

"Lord Sun Qian's anger is understandable since Xuan De's luck with women is clearly there in ample amounts~" Zi Long said as she looked at Gong You, "It's not too deep now but you have indeed become a pillar of support for a number of girls." Zi Long lightly poked me as she said so.

"Zi Long is at it again, how could I possible be capable of that huh..." I reached out to grab Zi Long's hand but my riding skills were too lousy and I could only squirm to avoid her.

Ben Chu did say something similar as well a couple of days ago but I still don't understand what they mean.

"Hm hm, you really are as blockheaded as a mosquito huh." Zi Long smirked, "In that case, then you can only wait and see what it's all about then."

Zi Long didn't sag any further. I felt like she meant something by those words but Zi Long wouldn't answer me no matter how I tried to probe her.

I tried to ask Gong You as well but she ignored me.

"... About that matter, my lord should stop his inquiries." Gong You said as she extended her hand and then returned to her usual calm expression before she continued, "Now that our organisation has grown, my lord ought to start thinking about giving out appointments and strengthening our logistics..."

She's going into lecture mode right away?

Hai, but I guess it's time I started learning about these things as well.

"Leave that aside for now, Lord Sun Qian. Xuan De, look ahead." Just then, Zi Long who had been silent all this while suddenly spoke up and pointed ahead.

Her tone was more severe than before and I became serious as well and looked ahead at where she was pointing at.

Up ahead was a small convoy that was slowly heading towards us.

The one at the head was wearing a light blue official uniform with floral motifs, with a shiny jade ornament hanging by her waist. Her rarely-seen silvery white hair was tied together by a red string. Just by looking from afar, one could sense the domineering and confident aura she exuded.

Wasn't that... Meng De?!

Chapter 4: Don't tell me this is an encounter with Meng De

TL: Back to Yun Chang's side in the next chapter.

When Meng De saw us coming in her direction, she smiled and saluted before she halted her convoy and waited for us to come over.

Her clothing, expression and even accessories were the same as before. But when I looked at Meng De now, my feelings were complicated.

If I said I didn't bear any grudge against Meng De for attacking and even attempting to eradicate me, that would be a lie. But again, it's not as if I bear deep hatred for her.

"Meng De..." When I saw Meng De walk over, I went forward and bowed out of courtesy's sake and wanted to say some words but couldn't think of what to say, perhaps because we haven't met for a long while after all. After wrangling about inside, all I could squeeze out was, "Long time no see."

"That isn't quite accurate since I have seen you on the battlefield before. You saw me too then right?" Meng De gave a confident smile as she tilted her head to the side.

So Meng De had seen me then huh. Even though we were so far apart.

"We both ran into many unexpected issues huh."

"Un, to be honest that was the first time I ran into so many things I wasn't able to foresee."

Though she said it as though she was in peril then, her expression was relaxed as always. I also don't think that there is anything Meng De can't foresee.

I'm also really surprised that I can speak so normally with Meng De. We should clearly be drawing swords and clashing but perhaps wars and conflict have become something normal to us that we aren't really affected.

"Meng De, you're..."

"Ah..." Meng De paused for a moment before she took out a piece of silk which had words and a large stamp mark, "I came here to deliver some paperwork to Ben Chu. She's coming over to Xuchang in a few days so I'm just personally receiving my future partner."

So she came to see Ben Chu huh. If Ben Chu sees Meng De later, she'll probably get angry again.

"Xuan De, I really must thank you for this."

"Eh? Where did that come from?"

Thank me? Why?

"Hm hm, you're saying such things again huh." Meng De shook her head, as though she were feeling helpless over my obliviousness.

"Whether you meant to or not, you must have said something to Ben Chu right?"

Said something huh.

"Un, I did say some words that weren't important."

"Not important huh..." Meng De continued to shake her head, "Honestly, I haven't seen Ben Chu acting how she is now in years."

Meng De closed her eyes as she said so, and seemed to be reminiscing about old times as her brows would twitch and a smile would flash across her face.

"Xuan De, perhaps if you haven't said those unimportant words, I could have won the war."

"How could I possibly have caused such a big effect..." I continued to insist on my point but in my heart, I realised that I did realise that I have changed a lot of things. Leaving aside everything else, Ben Chu's decision to accept Meng De's proposal to end the war may not have gone the same way if it were left to herself.

"Looks like Xuan De is the same as always even after everything huh. Un? Isn't this person..." Just then, Meng De saw Zi Long behind me and Zi Long saluted in response.

"This is Zhao Yun Zhao Zi Long, she was previously Gongsun Zan's subordinate general."

"Oh~ So this was the warrior who stopped 3 of my subordinate generals then huh?" Meng De's smile got ever more radiant as she sized up Zi Long.

"The Imperial Chancellor's warriors are not weak. They just have poor compatibility fighting together." I was surprised at what Zi Long said but Meng De burst into jovial laughter instead.

"Hahaha, you really are the sort of hero who would serve Xuan De. If only I had Xuan De's charisma, then my dream of unifying the world would be more probable."

"Don't joke around, Meng De."

She was currently smiling wryly at me. From the beginning up till now, Meng De's smile had never faded. I don't know if I'm being too self-aware but it feels like Meng De is really happy about meeting me here.

Perhaps I'm just thinking too much.

"Ah yes, where is Yun Chang headed now?" Since we met Meng De anyway, I might as well ask her and get a solid grasp on where Yun Chang is headed to now.

“Un? Guan Yu? What’s up with Guan Yu?”

...

“Meng De, don’t play games with me...”

“Hahaha~” Meng De laughed happily again, “Alright, I’ll stop teasing you. Guan Yu has already left Xuchang and should have crossed several passes by now.”

I heaved a sigh of relief when I heard this. Leaving aside how her circumstances are like now, it’s good enough to hear that she’s alive and well.

But then, Meng De started scratching the back of her head uncharacteristically as she continued, “But I forgot to give her a permit so she should be having some trouble at the passes along the way.”

Eh?! Oh, right! Isn’t this [Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles]?!

Even for someone like me who doesn’t really know much about the Three Kingdoms, I do know about the part where [Guan Yu Crosses 5 Passes and Slays 6 Generals]. I’m not too clear on the specifics but I do know that Guan Yu is supposed to kill 6 people.

I wonder if Meng De knows what has happened... I don’t know what she will think if she knows that Yun Chang has killed her subordinate generals.

“I seek your understanding and forgiveness for any possible transgressions Yun Chang may have caused.” I immediately apologised in advance and bowed deeply just in case something did happen.

“Hahaha, actually Guan Yu has already killed a few subordinate generals of mine. It’s really embarrassing~”

She already knew huh... This is bad. I didn’t think I would meet Meng De after Yun Chang did something. How am I going to make it up to Meng De?

“Xuan De, why are you looking so apologetic? In times of war, anything can happen and it’s not strange for anyone to die at anytime. All I can say about Yun Chang killing some of my subordinates is that I need to recruit stronger people. That’s all. In any case, she also had the help of others.”

It’s not that I don’t understand where Meng De is coming from but I can’t accept it. It’s probably this difference that sets and keeps Meng De and I apart.

“Meng De. I’ve been thinking about such things a lot lately.” I said as I faced Meng De with a serious expression. I’ve been able to realise a lot of things in the battles in this period after all, “I find that my strength is far too lacking. It’s not that I lack troops and generals or land but rather, I’m still not taking things seriously enough. It seems like I still haven’t found the resolve I ought to have as I face the troubled times of this era.”

I've begun to realise that whether it was in battles or in military affairs, I've not been able to contribute at all. Even in daily governance and administrative matters, I'm a burden. If this goes on, I will not have the means, or reason, to survive in these troubled times, even if I am Liu Bei. And I feel that the source of my incapability is my lack of resolve.

Meng De has always been how she is now, and it's clear that she has the resolve and the right mentality to face the troubled times. This is probably why she can smile like that.

In comparison, I'm probably less than a water flea.

How should I see my position, and what sort of mentality should I hold?

"What the heck is Xuan De saying huh~" Meng De smiled as she shook her head, "All Xuan De lacks is the right aura about him."

"Aura?"

Meng De nodded, and her smile became kinder.

"In every battle I've fought with or against you, I can feel the auras of Guan Yu, Zhang Liao, and even that of your administrative officials." Meng De looked at Gong You as she said so, and Gong You uncharacteristically returned the glance head on, "But Xuan De is too kind all the time. Even if you don't actually have it in you, you should still project your aura on the battlefield."

(TL: In short, fake it until it becomes real.)

Aura... Is that really it?

Meng De lightly patted my shoulders and flashed a reliable smile at me when she saw me sink into thought.

"One day, we will meet on the battlefield once more. I hope that when that day comes, you can let me feel a more forceful aura, and not the gentle and compassionate one I'm feeling now."

I couldn't fully understand what Meng De said, and looked at her, but she only smiled back and didn't say any further.

In any case, it's clear that I can't stay the same as I am now and should try and do something about it based on what I understand at least.

"I understand, Meng De." And so, I nodded at Meng De.

When Meng De saw my reaction, she seemed pleased and nodded as well.

"The road ahead is still long so Xuan De doesn't need to rush. Take it easy." Meng De pulled on the reins as she said so, "Until we meet again! At the next battlefield!"

When she finished, Meng De saluted me and left without saying anything further.

Chapter 5: Don't tell me this is a long journey (1)

Yun Chang POV

The perilousness of crossing the Yellow River cannot be understated. I've long since heard of this, but as a northerner, this is the first time I'm experiencing this concept personally.

I gripped onto the side of the wooden boat, and tried to stabilise the boat; but alas, my efforts were in vain as my strength alone was insufficient as the boat continued to rock about in every direction haphazardly. Such a tumultuous ride would be torturous even for the ones in the cabin.

After we went to sleep after drinks, Lu Bu has not woken up yet, which made our journey that more arduous as her help was sorely needed here.

And now, I was currently outside the cabin with Wen Yuan and Liao Hua, where we tried futilely to row against the elements.

Since the winds started blowing just now, apart from the howl of the north wind and the crashing of waves, nothing else could be heard.

"Yun Chang, our rowing doesn't seem to be working at all!" Wen Yuan yelled out from the other side of the boat as she fervently moved the oars. Her efforts only produced some waves and seemed like it didn't help to move the boat at all.

"Just hang on for a while more! We're almost at the shore!" The fog had dissipated for a while previously and we had caught a good glimpse of the shore. The fog was now back but we should be close to the shore by now. Of course, this is if what I saw before was not an illusion.

I really don't understand though. If we follow the course of all other boats from the Yellow River Crossing, the journey should be relatively smooth yet why have we met with such horrid weather and waves?!

Or was my luck just poor and I happened to choose a poor time to set off? And from just now, Meng Huo and the Nanman have gone missing. Their boat has likely capsized but I don't have the leisure to be concerned about them as I have my hands full with trying to make sure we don't capsize as well.

I just hope they turn out alright, I prayed in my heart as I picked up my oars and rowed vigorously to prevent the boat from heading off in some weird direction. If we kept following the flow of the currents, we would probably end up at Xu state.

Big brother, this journey to return to your side is really hard. Is this some sort of trial?

Who knows.

Sweat streamed down my head and merged with the water from the river waves which buffeted my body, making my clothes completely soaked and weighing me down.

I wonder how the girls in the cabin are holding up with such strong waves.

"Liao Hua! Liao Hua! Go and check on the girls for me!" Liao Hua either has poor hearing or she's a little ditzy as she only set down her oars after a dozen or so seconds after I called out to her twice.

In any case, I hope we reach the shore as soon as possible. It's a little embarrassing to admit this, but I don't know how to swim at all.

"Yun Chang! Look!"

Un?!

Wen Yuan yelled out excitedly as she pointed straight ahead. I looked at where she was pointing at, and saw a dark line in the distance.

That was the shore!

Thereafter I and Wen Yuan rowed as if our lives depended on it. Liao Hua was completely drained by then and collapsed on the floor of the boat as she held on to the ropes in the boat.

After we struggled for about an hour, we finally made it to the shore.

Hu... Hu... Hu... I dragged my leaden body onto shore as I staggered out of the boat.

Hai... When I finally made it to land, my legs became jelly and I collapsed onto the sand. Though the peak of winter has passed, the season was not over, and it was still very chilly. Even though my drenched body made the cold even more piercing, I couldn't take it anymore and just lay there.

"Ah~~~ I'm so tired~~~" Wen Yuan was also sitting on the ground, "There weren't much waves when we were nearing the shore but I was out of strength by then already."

"Lord Zhang Liao shouldn't be too careless. This sort of place usually has pirates and robbers about so you shouldn't be too relaxed."

"Liao Hua, it's not very convincing if you tell me that while you're lying on the ground."

These 2 were also thoroughly exhausted. But it seems like they know how to swim so they weren't in as desperate circumstances as I was.

This place is... I slowly got up and squinted as I looked into the distance.

We left the Crossing at first light so about 10-12 hours should have passed and it should be the late afternoon now. The fog has not dissipated, and it feels like our surroundings are

grey and bleak. There were no roads nor were there any columns of smoke. Just tall grass to our left, and a forest to our right. Further up, they seem to have blended together.

Pirates and thieves wouldn't be out and about in such weather, I hope.

"Girls, you can come out now. It doesn't seem like we are in danger." I yelled to the boat at the back. For me now, even yelling was extremely difficult. Looks like I need to train up my physical endurance again.

"Ughhh..."

"Mi Zhen, be careful."

When I looked back, I saw Mi Zhen stagger out of the boat. As the boat itself was quite tall, Gan Qing hurriedly went to help Mi Zhen down. They both looked terrible. Looks like the ride before has left a lasting impact on them.

Un?

"Where is Lord Lu Bu and Lord Hua Tuo?" I asked when I saw only the 2 of them coming out from the boat.

"They're still asleep and haven't woken up yet."

What can I say? Being able to stay asleep despite such strong waves has to be some sort of talent.

"Tell the troops to wake them up."

I didn't bring very many troops along with us, only about a dozen or so, and dismissed the rest. Most of them came from regions south of the Yellow River after all, and had left behind their wives and husbands. Bringing them along across the Yellow River would have been too cruel so I dismissed anyone who had a family waiting for them back south.

"I can't believe my lord has been sleeping all this while while we've been suffering!" Wen Yuan began to throw a tantrum as she waved her hands up and down while she lay on the sand, making 2 semi-circles in the sand.

I do bear some grudge as well but this wasn't the time for that.

I looked up but I couldn't find the sun. Where was this?

Perhaps we should have realised that we would have gotten lost after coming onto the shore. We don't have a map of Jiangbei so we have no idea where we were, nor could we find our bearings since the sun can't be found.

By right, we should be close to Dong commandery and Runan should be a little north of there.

“Liao Hua, do you still have any strength left?”

“I’m supposed to be a Registrar, how can I possibly have any strength left?” She said this as calmly as ever, but compared to her usual voice, it was weaker now.

Looks like Liao Hua is the worst off amongst us. I was planning to have her survey the surroundings but I probably can’t do that now.

“It’s getting late, so let’s set up camp first. Everyone’s clothes are also wet so we should let them dry before we set off again.”

We can’t be too hasty now. We’ve already crossed the Yellow River so our journey is mostly over so we can take our time a little and start scouting at first light tomorrow when the fog has dissipated.

I also want to search for Meng Huo and the rest. I just hope they haven’t actually sunk to the bottom of the Yellow River.

By the time our bonfires were burning and our 2 big tents were set up, night had descended and the fog had dissipated. Looking into the distance, there wasn’t much more information to be gleaned as it was still grass and forest as far as the eye could see.

After searching about for the rest of the day, we still couldn’t find any sign of Meng Huo and the Nanman. Even they have all drowned, there should still be some sign of them wash up ashore. And so I daringly imagined that they had abandoned ship and had swam down the Yellow River.

You can’t use the logic of the Central Plains when thinking about the Nanman people after all. I reasoned to myself as I scooped out a bowl of porridge from the pot, eager to eat as soon as possible.

The porridge we made was really tasty, and it tasted even better when we were this tired. At times like these, it’s best not to think about wine and meat as that would be a little too overboard to wish for after all.

I scooped out another bowl and brought it to Liao Hua.

“Ah, thanks General Guan.” Liao Hua was completely drained but she was still sitting by the fireside and when she saw me bring her porridge, she received it with both hands.

“No need to be so formal with me.” I sat beside her as I said so and stretched my hands out to the fire.

Because our clothes were drenched, we had taken them off and they were now hanging by the fire.

“Do you need me to get porridge for the rest?”

"Ah, no need for that. Just let them sleep a little more."

Leaving aside Lu Bu and Hua Tuo, Zhang Liao and the girls have already fallen asleep. Today was very tiring for them so they should just sleep and they can eat when they wake up from hunger.

"General Guan, are we heading to Dong commandery?"

"Un, my big brother should be either at Dong commandery or Runan so I'm thinking we should head there to find him." Just then, I realised that Liao Hua knew nothing about big brother and asked, "Have you heard about my big brother before?"

"Un, I have heard of some rumours but I haven't seen him before. I've heard that he is quite renowned in the north so he should be a hero."

Hahaha, a hero huh. If big brother were here, he would definitely shake his head and deny it.

"When you see my big brother, you will understand. Big brother always gives off a strange and magical aura~"

"Un?"

Liao Hua didn't understand, but I think that she will begin to respect and eventually pledge her loyalty to big brother before long.

I don't actually understand it myself, exactly what about big brother is so attractive and mesmerising. But sometimes, some words of his are enough to lead people to a realisation. This is naturally something that most people can't achieve.

Die~~~~ Charge~~~~

Un? Where did that noise come from?

"It came from the forests!" Liao Hua reacted first and stood up immediately.

Could it be there are robbers?!

Chapter 6: Don't tell me this is a long journey (2)

Yun Chang POV

I swiftly got some pails of water and doused the fires with Liao Hua, and after that, we quietly tiptoed into the forest to see what was going on.

As we went deeper into the forest, the sounds became clearer. The light from fires which was still somewhat covered by the forests was now much clearer. The fog was still there however, making the light blurry.

“3rd and 4th platoons, hold the line! Stick it into them from the right!”

The sound of horse hooves could be heard along with commands being issued. This was probably the voice of a commander from one side.

The voice was very delicate, and seemed like it belonged to a lady from an esteemed household. But the words were a little coarse, and didn’t fit the image of a refined lady.

“Looks like there’s some conflict ahead huh...” I muttered softly as I squinted, hoping to get a better glimpse of things.

We were now separated from the battlefield ahead by about a small forest’s distance or so and couldn’t see very clearly what was happening. All I could tell was that the flames were advancing in 1 direction, which clearly meant that the side behind the flames were holding the advantage.

But that alone was not able to tell me if there was a village ahead or if this conflict was between robbers and villagers, or between different groups of robbers.

Looks like the decision to come without Lu Bu and Wen Yuan was correct. They are a lot more trigger-happy than I am and would probably just charge out the moment they recognised that there was a conflict afoot. Even if they didn’t charge out, they would probably do something that would cause both sides to be alarmed and then we would find ourselves embroiled in a chaotic battle.

“General Guan, let’s go back first.” Just then, Liao Hua spoke to me, her face calm as ever, and she began to quietly get up as she finished without waiting for my reply.

But...

“I wish to observe for a while more. If 1 side happens to be ordinary people, then we should assist them.”

“General Guan, you want to bother with this sort of thing huh...” Liao Hua seemed to have guessed my intentions from my face, and frowned as she squatted beside me, “Conflicts are commonplace in these troubled times. If something happened up ahead, they will deal with

it themselves. It is their fate to have met with this. We don't even have 50 men in total, and we're pretty tired out. What could we possibly..."

Bang! *Bang*! *Bang*!

Just then, waves of explosions came from up ahead and flames snaked across the ground and rose to the skies. Many sparks and fragments that were sent into the sky fell over where we were.

"Watch out!" I hurriedly pulled down Liao Hua when I saw this to prevent harm from coming to her.

When I looked ahead again, I saw that the side which had charged in were now in disarray and escaping in all directions. Looks like the other side knows how to make traps huh. Traps that can spit out flames under the cover of this fog will be a bane to the charging side.

Charge!!!

Just then, the side with the traps began to charge forth. Each troop seemed to have a torch in their hands, and they soon got into a proper formation unlike the other side that had just charged in haphazardly.

Judging by the positions of the torches, they should be in a wedge formation. Looks like they intend to finish it with this charge.

"Don't panic! Just block this wave and our reinforcements will arrive and outflank them!"

Though the leader of the other side yelled out profusely with all her strength, her troops didn't listen and continued to escape in every direction.

I'd thought they would have won with their charge but looks like they're the ones who will fall.

"What an unexpected result."

Liao Hua's words were exactly what I was thinking as well. I really didn't think that a single turning point could overturn the outcome of a battle just like that. Battles really can be decided in an instant huh.

But since that side has traps, they can't be villagers or a village militia and this conflict is most probably between 2 opposing sides of robbers.

Though I'm not too happy with leaving things as they are, it looks like this has nothing to do with us so what we should do now is to swiftly return and wait for these 2 sides to leave without detecting our presence...

Dadada- *Neigh*~~~

Just then, a horse's neigh could be heard from nearby and before we knew what was

happening, a black shadow leapt across Liao Hua and I.

Da! The black shadow landed, throwing dirt into the air as it did so. When I looked over, a black stallion stood there with a girl riding on it.

The girl had a large cape behind her and was wearing a wide-brimmed bamboo hat with a mask covering her mouth so I couldn't see any features she had.

"The one you're after is here! Come and get me!" The girls yelled out fervently, hoping to get the attention of the other side. Looks like she intends on using herself as bait so her troops can safely retreat.

"She's an honourable person too huh."

"General Guan, not now..." Liao Hua stopped me, afraid that we would get in trouble from being found out. As we were still laying down in the tall grass, she hasn't seen us yet.

Charge!!!

The commander on the other side seems to have taken the bait as the sounds seem to be approaching.

"Come get me!" The masked girl swung her reins and galloped away as she said so.

Eh? No! Isn't that direction where our camp is?

"Oi! Don't go in that direction!" I hurriedly stood up and yelled out at the masked girl but she was already out of sight.

"General Guan, can you please don't do silly things at this time..." Liao Hua said as she tapped my shoulder. I looked back at her and she moved to the side, revealing an encirclement of soldiers pointing their weapons at us.

"Looks like it's our fate to be embroiled in this mess huh." Liao Hua sighed.

"Ya!"

In the next instant, the troops acted first and stabbed their long spears at us.

"Liao Hua, jump!" I ordered and then concentrated before leaping up into the air.

My whole body was lifted with the strength in my waist and curled up my legs before kicking out-

Dong! *Dong*!

2 dull sounds rang out as 2 soldiers flew out from my kicks.

"..." Liao Hua wordlessly dodged the attacks and squatted down all of a sudden before she

extended her hand and caught a soldier's knee and flipped him to the ground.

I didn't think that Liao Hua was this good at unarmed combat as well. In comparison to her, my movements are a lot more rough.

I sighed in amazement as I picked up a wooden pole off the ground and did my best to knock them out without killing them or risking injury.

I don't know how many people are headed in this direction but it's never easy to deal with a numerical disadvantage. So we can only retreat as we fight.

"Liao Hua!" As I thought so, I called out to Liao Hua, who turned and looked at me. She nodded in understanding and grabbed a spear before retreating in my direction.

As we retreated, the troops that were inside the fog began to come for us, in greater numbers than before. There were even crossbowmen in the back who began to fire at us, making our retreat even more difficult.

"Kill those locusts!"

"Who asked them to come steal our grain!"

Gradually, the troops in the front and middle began to yell and curse at us. Looks like they've taken us for the ones who were attacking just now.

"A misunderstanding! It's just a misunderstanding! We were just passing by!" I tried to clarify matters but the surrounding voices drowned out mine and my shouts were of no use at all and I only wasted my saliva trying.

"Ha!" Just then, a sonorous roar could be heard from afar that shook my heart. My intuition told me that danger was coming from the front, and I lowered my head instinctively, just as an iron arrow flew out and took a strand of hair of mine.

This is...

"Hmph! So you can dodge my attack huh?!" A mocking voice came from afar, and when I looked at where the source was, I saw a tall official hat sprouting out above the troops.

"Who are you?" I yelled back.

In the next instant, the troops actually stopped their attack and opened up a path for the tall official hat. In the fog, the person had her chest up with her hands at her back, looking like she was on top of the world.



"Who am I? Though I am not obliged to tell you that, I suppose I can share it with you on account of your ability to resist us this much." She said in a ridiculing tone, and then she continued in a tone filled with arrogance, "I am an official of the Great Han— Chen Gong Chen Gong Tai, why won't you locusts off yourselves now?!"

(TL: Chen Gong was supposed to be an official who served Cao Cao and then later on, Lu Bu before dying just before Lu Bu did.)

Chapter 7: Don't tell me this is a long journey (3)

Yun Chang POV

I was actually a merchant in the past, and I sold dates and meat with my father, and had even managed a stall before. Business was decent and we got by since people had to eat even if the world was in chaos. I'd heard that cases where merchants were murdered and robbed were increasing but thanks to my good luck, I've never met with such incidents before.

But here I am now, being robbed.

"How is it, is there anything good?"

At this time, Liao Hua and I were tied to a tree while the woman called Chen Gong had some female thieves search us in the hopes of finding some valuables, with Liao Hua being the one searched first.

"Only 1 whetstone and 2 books." The female soldier reported with disappointment on her thin face. She was clearly expecting more.

"Wu..." Liao Hua closed her mouth and sighed unhappily. She frowned slightly but didn't say anything.

"I didn't think you carried a whetstone along with you."

"It's just my hobby. I feel very uncomfortable when I see blunt blades."

Such a hobby exists...

"Alright. Then when my glaive becomes rusty, I'll leave it to you." That saves me a good deal of trouble, and Liao Hua's techniques should be excellent.

Liao Hua gave me a look that said 'what are you talking about at this time', and twisted her arms but the ropes were tied well and weren't the sort that could be easily struggled out of.

I'd tried it before already but though the ropes weren't thick, they were tied tightly, and the coils weren't many so they dug into the flesh, which made it hurt when you tried to struggle, making it difficult to put in strength.

"Don't bother. It's unsightly of you lot to even think about escaping under these circumstances." Chen Gong said as she sat on a stool in front of us with her arms folded across her chest. It was dark now but I could see a look of disgust on Chen Gong's face.

The traps from before were probably designed by her. But there's no point in looking so pleased about your victory at us...

"Umm, I think you are having a misunderstanding. We're not with those people from

before.”

“What? You’re still trying to quibble your way out of this?” Chen Gong said, “Alright, let’s say you’re not 1 of them, how do you even know that they belong to an organisation? And why are you here?”

“After we crossed the Yellow River, we set up camp by the shore. We came to investigate what happened after we heard some commotion.”

“Hahaha, what a coincidence. Those thieves seemed to have come from across the Yellow River as well, and they came to our village town to steal provisions.”

Steal provisions... Looks like these people are the villagers huh.

“We have not stolen any provisions.” Liao Hua said in a low voice.

“I’ll decide whether you have stolen them or not.” She gestured with her right hand as she said so and summoned another female soldier, “You, go and search that green robed woman.”

Green robed woman, that name is a little hurting.

“U, umm, I apologise for this.” The female soldier came forward and bowed.

Her hair was tied back in twintails, while she wore a set of short robes made from coarse cloth. You could tell from 1 look that this person was very poor. When she came up to me, she didn’t know where to search first and her big beautiful eyes wavered about.

“It’s fine, go ahead and search.” I’m not afraid of being searched since I actually had nothing on me and the results of the search could prove my innocence anyway.

The female soldier withdrew a bit at first, but she soon began to search me carefully.

“Why are you showing pity to these thieves...” Chen Gong was displeased at this but she didn’t say any further and took out a fan and began fanning herself.

“May I ask if your village is up ahead?”

“Didn’t you come and steal provisions just 2 days ago?”

“Does your village have an abundance of resources?”

“Abundance?” She scoffed at my words, “If we had abundance, we could have given you provisions.”

I’m in a precarious situation now but now that I think about it, it makes sense. What I cannot accept is this Chen Gong’s attitude.

“I understand, it’s not easy being refugees like you lot. But the village town doesn’t have the

ability to support you lot. These are troubled times so there will always be those who die from hunger. All I can do is to ensure that the citizens of my jurisdiction don't starve." Chen Gong stood up as she said so with a cold look on her face.

If you think about it from the perspective of the citizens and her, Chen Gong might be a good official after all.

"As long as I ensure that the citizens If this village town live well, I'll have a chance to be promoted when the state Governor comes and inspect the village town!"

... I retract what I thought before.

"So you're just infatuated with officialdom huh." Liao Hua hadn't spoken till now, and now that she did, she went straight for the jugular.

"And so what if I am?" Chen Gong's face became stormy and she bent forward but controlled her emotions and began pacing about, "Using martial strength to gain power is 1 way, it is simple but crude. Rising through the system as an official takes skill and knowledge. Wouldn't it be nice if I were to leave my name in history by gaining power this way?"

A breeze blew in from the sea and sent the smell of waves and salt into my nose. It passed by me and blew through the forest, making the leaves rustle. The wind's strength wavered and strengthened and made Chen Gong's clothes billow out behind her. The flags which several soldiers behind her held also floated up. Looks like the fog will be lifted soon.

Chen Gong stood unmoving, with her hands spread out in front of her and an upright look on her unlike before. Several soldiers nearby nodded at what she said but most just stood there like wooden blocks. In my heart, I felt that this Chen Gong person didn't deserve to be left forgotten in a small corner of the world like this. This person was rather irritating but she had ambition and a path she sought to follow. From how things look, she also has the capability to follow through with it.

"There is nothing valuable to be found on this woman." That female soldier from before seemed to have reached a conclusion, and she stood up to give her report. It feels like she's slightly livelier than before.

"Is that so? Alright, get back in line." Chen Gong didn't say any further and dismissed her.

"In that case, we'll lock them up for the time being. Looking at them, they're probably some mid-ranking officers so they'll be good chips to bargain with your leader later."

When she finished, the 2 female soldiers who had searched us before came up and loosened our bindings.

We look like mid-ranking officials huh... Leaving aside me, Liao Hua was a city Registrar so she should have been seen as a second-in-command at least.

"General Guan."

"No, not yet."

When the ropes slackened, Liao Hua called out to me softly. I know she thinks that we should swiftly escape from here but we are heavily surrounded so even if the troops here are not strong, it will be difficult for us to escape.

In any case, we hadn't actually done any wrongdoing and should not have been a part of this to begin with. Now that we have, we shouldn't kill these village militia.

The way forward was to go with the flow and patiently wait. All we can do now is hope that Lu Bu realises that something happened and thinks of way to save us.

"I understand."

I don't know if she actually understands what I mean but she nodded so I'll take it as if she understands.

"A wise choice." Chen Gong slapped her knees and stood up when she saw us cooperating and didn't look at us anymore as she walked through the soldiers and led the way back.

"Though I understand where General Guan is coming from, should we really not escape now?" Liao Hua repeated herself as she stood up, as this was the last chance after all.

But I was adamant on this.

"Un, it's just a misunderstanding. If we escape, then that misunderstanding will become real." I said as I nodded to reassure Liao Hua, "We'll look out for any opportunities. It looks like there's more to this conflict as well."

Chen Gong and her people called them locusts, not thieves, so those people only stole provisions. It also felt like those people were fundamentally different from thieves as they were a little too organised.

The wind got stronger, and the cold became ever more piercing as our clothes were still wet. I'd thought that the journey to Dong commandery and Runan wouldn't be long but who knew that this would happen.

Looks like it really is as Liao Hua said. It is our fate to have met with this.

Chapter 8: Don't tell me this is a long journey (4)

Feng Xian POV

The night gradually retreated and the skies brightened up. But because it wasn't comfortable sleeping on the beach, my body was still plagued with fatigue and it was difficult to keep my eyes open. Currently, I was sitting cross-legged on a round stump beside the bonfires, rocking back and forth to fight my sleepiness.

"Here, my lord." I opened my eyes when I heard Wen Yuan's voice come from the side and saw her bending down on my left with a wooden tray in her hands. On the tray was a clay bowl of water and some dried meat strips.

"Ah, thanks Wen Yuan." I yawned and took the tray with 1 hand and placed it on the ground. I took the clay bowl and drank some of the hot water before dipping my other hand into the bowl and dabbing my eyes.

I then set down the bowl and picked up some dried meat and bit into it. After crossing the Yellow River, the meat became damp and was difficult to bite into. After chewing it for a bit, I found that the taste was also worse off. But whatever the case, having something to eat is better than nothing after all.

"Red Hare..." I called softly and loosened my breastplate, revealing Red Hare's furry body. I placed the meat at Red Hare's mouth and Red Hare tried to tear away the piece of meat by moving its head about as he bit down on it like a little wolf.

"Ha~~" I shivered and exhaled as I watched Red Hare's cuteness and felt healed, "So cold~"

My body temperature has probably dropped because I was drenched.

"I can't believe my lord has the cheek to say that~ Weren't you sleeping really well while we were fighting to cross the Yellow River..." Wen Yuan admonished me when she saw my tardy look after she came back from bringing food to the lasses.

"Ah~ My head hurts~ The hangover from 2 days ago isn't gone yet~ Un, I should go and rest."

"Don't try and run my lord (Feng Xian)... I might just report this to our lord (Liu Bei)."

Shock Wh, what, how could this sort of reason scare me?

"Our lord (Liu Bei) might be put off by your indolence and refrain from using my lord (Feng Xian) if anything happens~"

— What? Feng Xian didn't show her valiant and heroic side at a time like this? How disappointing! I thought you were dependable!

Wu... What the heck is appearing in my head...

"... Wen Yuan, how dare you backstab your lord."

"My lord will definitely understand if she has to endure being engulfed by the Yellow River water for almost 1 whole day."

Wen Yuan pouted, and seemed very displeased with me. It's not that I wanted to escape work. I really did drink too much and was completely knocked out after that. I really couldn't help it.

"Alright, I got it. Take it that I owe you all a favour then."

Sometimes, you just got to give way. And I did slack off after all.

"Un, that's my good lord." Wen Yuan rolled up her sleeves and flashed her passionate and refreshing smile when she heard my words.

In any case, now that we've crossed the Yellow River, our trip from here on out should be smoother and easier.

"Big sis Lu big sis Lu~" Just then, the little lass came running over to me.

But big sis Lu huh? That doesn't sound bad at all. If I remember correctly, this lass with braided tails should be Lord Mi Zhu's little sister right? What was her name again...

"Wh, what is the matter?" I was rather nervous at seeing her come running over to me as I hadn't really spoken much with her.

Should I be trying to make my gaze softer?

"My lord, that expression of yours right now is truly horrific."

... I think I'll return my gaze to normal.

The braided lass came running with a *dadada* until she came before me, and looked about before she asked, "Excuse me, have you seen big sis Guan?"

Un? Guan Yu huh? Come to think of it, I haven't...

I looked about as well.

"The ones on watch duty late last night were Lord Guan Yu and Liao Hua, could they still be sleeping now?"

"B, but when we went to find big sis Guan this morning, we didn't see her~"

"Un... That's strange then. Could they have gone ahead to scout the area?" I said as I calmly drank the water in the clay bowl. It was her after all, so there can't be any issues.

"Leaving aside the whereabouts of Lord Guan Yu, can I pose a question?"

"Un? What's the matter my lord?"

"I want to ask," I stood up before I continued, "Who is this behind me?"

There was a masked woman who was tied up and out cold behind the stump I was sitting on.

"Eeek~~~"

"Who is that fellow!!"

Leaving aside the little lass, why is Wen Yuan freaking out too...

Now then-

Pu~

"Haa!"

I took a basin filled with ice-cold river water and splashed it on the black-clothed masked woman's face, and she seemed like she came back to life and breathed heavily as though she just emerged from a dive.

"Wu~"

"Don't come here little lass, this fellow is dangerous."

I pushed the braided little lass, who was surprised at the person before her, back to Gan Qing. I then reached out and pulled the mask down from the woman's face while she was still regaining her senses.

The woman had very good features and big, bright eyes with a small mouth. She looked a little wild but she seemed like she would be a good target to fulfill a desire for conquest.

(TL: Yes, it means what you think it means, no ambiguity in the raws. Lu Bu, WTF????! But if you think about it, Lu Bu in this story being bi makes sense as the story with Diao Chan would probably have played out if our MC didn't run into her.)

Though she looked beautiful, I don't know her nor do I know why she was tied up behind the round stump. So as a precautionary measure, I left her bindings alone.

"Oi, oi, quit being in a daze." Seeing that she was more or less awake, I took the bowl of water that Wen Yuan held, and brought it to her face, "Have some water. When you're done, tell us who you are and why you're here."

"My lord, you're being too quick with your questions." Wen Yuan said helplessly as she

patted my shoulders.

"So now you're calm huh? You were still freaking out just now eh?"

"What do you mean freaking out? Isn't my lord's obtuse and slow reaction worse?" Wen Yuan frowned. It's just 1 person, what's the big deal?

"Wu.." Just then, the girl painfully opened her eyes and shook her head before her eyes began to focus, "This is... Wait, why am I being tied- Ow!"

Just as she was trying to get a hold of what was going on, she stopped thinking from pain. Looking at her movements, she probably hurt her back. If need be, we can get Lord Hua Tuo to have a look at her later.

"This is our encampment, and we found you tied up outside our tent." I gave a brief explanation, and brought the water to her again, "Are you alright? Have some water first."

"Ah, I should thank you first for this. By the way, could you untie me?"

"We'll leave the ropes on first since we don't know where you came from." Wen Yuan hurriedly said in a guarded tone.

"Hmph, if you know my origins, you will probably be shocked. But whatever, if it weren't for some weirdo who did me in, I wouldn't be..."

The woman clicked her tongue with a look of disgust that was at odds with her image but she seemed to be really thirsty as she bent down to drink from the water I held.

"*Shiku*... Pu!" In the exact instant when she raised her head and looked at me, her eyes bulged and she spat out the water she just drank.

"Aiyo! Good thing I dodged in time." I was unscathed as I was able to move to the side in time.

"Yes, it got onto my skirt... And it only just got dry." Wen Yuan, who was behind me, was not able to react in time and the water landed on her skirt.

But did she choke? If so, why did she spit everything out?

"You! It's you!" Just then, the woman began to look at me with fury.

Me?

"Umm, are you talking about me?" I said as I pointed at myself, oblivious to what I have done.

"You're the one who suddenly charged over while I was on my horse! And now you're still humiliating me like this!"

"Eh?" What's going on?

"My lord, did you do all that?" Wen Yuan said as she shook her head with her hands on her hips.

"I was having a good sleep, how could I possibly have gone to so much trouble?"

"Could you have been sleepwalking, my lord?" Wen Yuan pointed at me as she looked at me with distrustful eyes, "My lord is even more unbridled in her acts when she is asleep."

Could there be such a thing... But I did indeed find dirt all over my leggings this morning...

If I did indeed sleepwalk and captured someone while I was doing so, I wonder what sort of dream I was seeing then.

(TL: Fun fact – Sleepwalkers aren't actually dreaming. This is a common misconception. The Chinese term for it is even 梦游 where the first character is that of 'dream'.)

"I'm really sorry for my lord's uncouthness. Please do forgive her." Wen Yuan apologised as she lowered her head. I felt pretty bad about it as well, and nodded.

"If you're sorry then let me go at once! I still have a lot of important things to do! My people are still waiting for me behind the mountains~"

Her people? Looks like she's not some small fry huh. Could she be 1 of Cao Cao's generals? But then her attire wouldn't be seen in any official army.

"Un, umm..." Just then, Gan Qing suddenly spoke up as she took a step forward, "Excuse me, did something happen nearby yesterday?"

"... Why do you ask?" At this question, the woman appeared guarded.

"2 people on our side have gone missing so if something did happen then they are likely to have gotten themselves caught up in that." Wen Yuan explained.

"... Come to think of it, Chen Gong's side seemed to have been stopped by some people."

"Explain yourself! We don't have so much time!"

Wang! *Wang*! *Wang*!

I lost my cool when I heard her unclear speech and grabbed the woman's collar.

"Calm down, my lord." Wen Yuan said as she clapped my shoulders. I swallowed my emotions and pushed the woman away.

"We were wrong to have captured you but our companions are now lost and if something did happen, we have to go and save them immediately. I believe you should be able to understand how we feel." Wen Yuan bowed when she finished.

"We too seek your assistance." Gan Qing bowed as well, and so did the braided lass.

Hai! This really is...

"I'm not too willing, but please assist us."

"... Alright."

I don't know what happened but it seems like we've gotten ourselves involved in some troublesome matters again.

Chapter 9: Don't tell me this is a long journey (5)

Yun Chang POV

After we followed the militia for about 3-5 km, a village appeared before us. It was pretty big, and as Chen Gong said, it was more like a town than a village.

Several dozen adobe houses were neatly arranged in a flat valley at the foot of a mountain. Because it was still early in the morning, there was a fire going in most of the houses and pillars of smoke rose to the skies. Looking further ahead, there was a water mill at the end of the river. The current continuously drove the wooden water wheel, powering the water mill. I'd always heard of such a convenient thing in the north but this was the first time I've ever seen it myself.

(TL: Adobe is a type of brick made out of sun-dried mud.)

Just as we stepped into the village, many villagers came running out of their houses and gathered before Chen Gong, and asked how she was doing and if she needed anything. Clearly, she had strong support from her people.

When they heard they'd won, everyone cheered and danced. Chen Gong was hugged by everyone, and received an almost god-like welcome.

I was still worried at first about our treatment once we came to the village since we'd been taken as members of the robbers but Chen Gong did not hand us over to the mob. After she spoke with some of the elders for a bit, she waved over the female soldier who tied me up and gave her some instructions. The female soldier then brought us down a side road away from the crowd.

"Hide the ropes on your hands, don't let anyone see them." The female soldier said softly, though she didn't seem to make any effort to hide what she said. Liao Hua and I looked at each other and then complied by acting as though we were walking with our hands behind our backs.

"To be able to govern and manage this place well takes some skill and patience, even with the water mill and the strong support of the people."

As we left the crowd, my curiosity led me to look about. The more I looked, the more I felt that this village town was well managed and began to heap praise. Now that battles are so commonplace, the lack of manpower is an issue which can be alleviated by something like the water mill.

"That Chen Gong looks like a cunning swindler but she's pretty good huh."

Why do you have to use such negative adjectives huh, Liao Hua.

"That's right, our leader made this village the way it is now." The female soldier added in.

When she said this, she was extremely proud, as though she was the one who managed the village.

"Before our leader came here, we fell prey to many pillagers, and it's thanks to her that we are able to live decently now."

"So the reason why you're all so angry is because of those robbers right?"

Provisions are of extreme importance to both soldiers and ordinary citizens. They don't have enough to fill their stomachs to begin with so if they have to endure plundering by robbers, they will face up to the robbers with the resolve to fight to the death.

But after I finished, the female soldier did not reply. She neither agreed nor disagreed, and only continued to walk on wordlessly with a difficult expression on her face.

As we followed along the line of houses, we soon stopped at a residence. It was rather quaint and not all that big, and it was actually at the end of the line.

"This is..."

"My house," The female soldier bowed respectfully to me, and opened the door before entering, "The leader means for me to have you 2 stay here for now. When those thieves come again, we'll use you 2 in negotiations."

Isn't that a little too haphazard? Captives should be kept in a more spacious, empty environment with professionals standing guard. Leaving aside the place to keep us, just having 1 person guard 2 captives is already rather ludicrous.

"Aren't you afraid that we'll escape?"

"The leader told me not to worry about that as you would have ran away long ago if you wanted to do so."

That is indeed the case... But this lass is far too obedient.

"Here, have some water." The female soldier scooped out some water with a clay bowl and brought it to our mouths and slowly delivered the water down our throats. Her movements were delicate and well-practiced, it seems, and we had no difficulty drinking.

"The water's delicious."

"That's right, this water is from a spring in a nearby cave. We led the stream down here on the leader's orders."

She's even thought of that? She's definitely not a simple person.

As I thought so, I set aside my worries for now and looked at the surroundings. The house was not big, and when we came in, I didn't see anything that resembled a courtyard. When you entered the house, you came right into the hall. To the left was a room with a bed and

nothing else.

“Are your parents in the fields now? Or have they not yet returned from missions?”

It's not uncommon to have entire families in the army. That's one big source of recruitment after all.

“My parents died of hunger in a famine 7-8 years ago.”

“Eh?” I felt like I had stepped on a land mine, “Ah, I'm sorry about that, I shouldn't have asked.”

“No, I'm fine. It's been so many years already so even if I think about them, I can't remember what they look like anymore.” The female soldier said as she scooped water for herself and sat down on a stool across from us.

“A famine huh... Is the soil here barren?” Liao Hua stopped thinking about others things and had sat down to join us.

“The soil here is indeed barren, and it's difficult to grow much. But my family wasn't from here originally. We escaped from the north.”

“And then they starved to death when they couldn't find food?”

“Watch your mouth, Liao Hua.”

“No no no, it's really okay since that's the truth after all.” The female soldier waved her hands with a difficult expression, “Back then, I remember that we passed through a village which didn't have enough food to give to refugees so my parents could only leave.”

If that village had taken them in then, her parents wouldn't have died.

“I bore a grudge some time ago. Why didn't they do anything to save my parents? But now when I'm in their shoes, I realise that this is a difficult situation to be in.”

“Are you pitying the robbers? Robbers don't need any pity.”

“Please don't denigrate yourself. You're not robbers, just some refugees fleeing from famine who have no choice.”

Eh? What did she just say?

“You said we were refugees? And not robbers?”

“We've never treated you as robbers from the very beginning?” She seemed puzzled, “Aren't you refugees who fled from the famine in Si state?”

“Ah, no...”

So that's what it's all about. Both sides are ordinary citizens and the conflict is over provisions. And the attacking side comprises of refugees.

But when you think about it from the point of view of the village, the acts of the imperiled refugees are no different from robbers. As this female soldier said, as a member of the village, how could they possibly hand out provisions when they don't even have enough for themselves to begin with?

This conundrum is too difficult to deal with.

Just then, the female soldier seemed to have thought of something all of a sudden and took out a biscuit that looked like it was made using flour made from beans, and split it in 3 before bringing 2 parts to our mouths.

"This is..." To be honest, I was suspicious of this act of hers so I wasn't sure if I should bite even if she brought it to my mouth.

"I can't help most people, but if it's just 1 or 2, I hope I can do something. I know what it's like to be hungry after all." As she said so, she smiled and placed her part on the table, and licked the fragments on her fingers, "It's times like these that we should help each other out right?"

What an optimistic person. This is my impression of her now. She's probably just a few years younger than me but her heart is this wide?

"Ah, un." Just then, Liao Hua wordlessly bent forward and bit her part before closing her eyes and began to slowly chew.

"Liao Hua..."

Liao Hua continued to chew and swallowed before she said, "Delicious."

"Thanks! I made it myself! I was pretty confident about it too!" When the female soldier heard that, she became so jovial that it was as if she got glowing praises.

Optimistic people probably have more blessed lives.

Dong!!! *Dong*!!! *Dong*!!!

"This sound is!" When the female soldier heard the dull sounds of a gong, she stood up immediately.

"What's the matter?" I was infected by her tension as well, and felt anxious.

"Your companions may have arrived." The female soldier calmly said.

"I just hope they are 'our' companions." Liao Hua said just as calmly.

Chapter 10: Don't tell me this is a long journey (6)

Yun Chang POV

An alarmed atmosphere filled the sleepy village town in an instant following the sound of the gong. It was still calm inside the house, but the sounds of the crowd outside soon turned to a chaotic one as everyone panicked.

Looks like the refugees are here.

I didn't think that the masked leader was capable enough to reorganise so quickly.

No, now isn't the time to be impressed by others. Since they've come, we have an opportunity to make things clear.

"Ms soldier, don't you have to go?"

The female soldier's face was filled with tension and uneasiness, probably because she was worried about what it was like outside.

"My mission is to watch over you..." Her eyes kept flittering to the windows as she muttered, "I didn't think they've broken in already. The traps outside the village should have been activated..."

"It will be difficult to expect the same tricks to work on the enemy twice. They could have went around them as well."

Going around them isn't too long anyway so it should be possible.

"Looks like this decent village can't escape a perilous fate huh."

"What are you talking about Liao Hua, it's not decided yet."

If it's that Chen Gong, she should be able to save this village."

"No, we probably can't stop them."

Giya-

A calm, mocking voice could be heard just as the door was slammed open. Chen Gong calmly walked in in her usual official uniform and hat, her face unperturbed.

"Leader, has it..." The female soldier began to ask Chen Gong as she walked in.

"They've already gone around the main traps at the front. I set some traps on the side routes as well but for some reason they are destroyed in the instant that they are activated."

The one leading the charge must be a formidable warrior. Looks like that masked woman had some cards left after all.

"We can't meet them in a head-on fight as their numbers are far more than ours." Chen Gong looked at us as she continued, "So it's time to use you all."

"I've said this many times over already: We have nothing to do with those people."

"I give you the same reply as before: It's fine, I'll decide it." Chen Gong turned around when she finished and gestured to the female soldier before heading out.

After she got the order, the female soldier came up and helped us up, "Are you both really unrelated to those refugees?"

"Unfortunately for you, we aren't." I shook my head as I delivered the undeniable truth.

"I see," She seemed to have trusted me, and smiled bitterly as she continued, "Looks like we'll have to think of something else I guess?"

She sighed as she helped us up, and even helped to dust our clothes before leading us out.

This can't be helped right, I thought in my heart. Both sides are fighting to live and I can't justify helping either side, nor am I able to anyway.

No matter how optimistic she may be, this female soldier is just a commoner. Her parents have died and now she has to deal with another crisis. How much more hardship does she have to face in her life?"

"Ms soldier, what's your name? And how old are you?"

"Oh right, I haven't introduced myself." She said and saluted with a bow, "My name is Guan Ping and I just turned 15."

"Oh?! Ms soldier's surname is also Guan?! We're both from the same line!" I exclaimed, and reported my name as well, "I'm Guan Yu Guan Yun Chang of Xie county in Hedong, we share the same ancestors!"

"You're Guan Yu?!"

"Aiya, have you heard of my name before?"

I've done a fair bit ever since I started following big brother so it's not strange if she knows who I am.

"No, not at all."

"Pu..."

Liao Hua's chuckle made me feel embarrassed. But it's true that I haven't actually done

much I guess. Though why is she acting so shocked and surprised if she doesn't know who I am?

"Ah, no. I was just surprised that we share the same surname. Guan Yu huh..." She placed her hands on her chest and recited my name with a look of bliss.

I can understand how she feels as I too feel the same. I have no blood siblings after all so when I heard that she shared the same lineage as me, it felt like I gained a little sister.

"It feels like you're my family all of a sudden." She smiled as she looked at me meaningfully, "It feels like you're my mother."

"..."

"Pu!"

Liao Hua's reaction was even more intense this time. This was honestly the first time I've seen Liao Hua reacting like this.

Eh? Mother? Do I look that old?

When you think about it, is she really 15? Not only is she taller than me, her breasts are so well-developed that even I feel inferior.

"Oi! Get moving Guan Ping, the other side has crossed the trestle bridge already!"

As the doors opened wide, I looked outside and saw that the fog had completely dissipated.

(TL: Guan Ping is Guan Yu's oldest son.)

Following Guan Ping's lead, Liao Hua and I were now in an expansive flatlands near the water mill. After a while, a black crowd of people appeared about 100 paces away from us.

"Looks like those fellows have gotten the help of some formidable people." Chen Gong muttered as she rode atop a pygmy horse with several dozen cavalry behind her that looked like they were rather well-trained.

"Don't try anything funny later on, you 2. I have bowmen trained on you."

"Don't worry, we won't need to resort to anything funny." I felt really frustrated at her constant harping, "You better not kill us out of rage or sham later on."

Though I'll have an opportunity to escape at that point anyway.

"Don't worry. I'm an upright official after all so how could I commit such dishonourable acts in front of my citizens? I still have a lot of official positions to ascend to after all."

That last line was really unnecessary.

“But Chen Gong, do you really not intend on helping the refugees?”

“One is just overestimating oneself if one tries to help when one is unable to.” Chen Gong said unperturbedly. Looks like this isn’t the first time she’s met with such a situation, “Their disaster isn’t ours and we can’t save them without imperiling ourselves. Nor can we let them endanger us.”

I can’t raise any objections to this as she has to be responsible to the people in her village after all.

“Chen Gong! Bet you didn’t expect this! I, Zhou Cang, have come once more!”

The militia were shaken by this sudden yell. Though it was a female voice, it was rather coarse and forceful.

But this voice... It sounds like the masked woman.

(TL: Zhou Cang is a fiction only character who met Guan Yu on a random mountain road along this journey.)

The crowd on the other side parted and a woman walked out of the path made by the troops.

She had taken off her black clothing from before as well as her mask, revealing very attractive looks with luscious black hair. All she wore now were some tattered rags which showed her state of poverty.

So she’s called Zhou Cang huh?

“Hmph! So what if you’re back? I have your people with me!”

“My people?”

Good, shooting back the question should prove our innocence.

“See, Chen Gong? We aren’t—”

“Lord Guan Yu! Lord Liao Hua!” Just then, a voice called out to us from the other side.

Eh? I looked ahead and saw 2 women step out from the crowd.

It’s Lord Lu Bu and Wen Yuan!

“Un, I’ve seen and heard it.” Chen Gong nodded, “Looks like you’re with those thieves as expected.”

So Lord Lu Bu and the rest had contact with the refugees huh... The masked woman was

indeed headed for our encampment then after all.

"General Guan, it's a little late to say this," Liao Hua came over and spoke to me softly with a gleeful look, "But your expectation that General Lu Bu would save us covertly is just a fool's hope."

Damn it, my plans ailed again.

"Release those 2 immediately!"

"Sure we can, but you must promise to never disturb our village town ever again, return our stolen provisions, and get the hell out across the Yellow River!"

Chen Gong waved her hands as she declared this to which the militia began cheering 'Ha! Ha! Ha!' behind.

"Alright, no problem!"

"W... Wait wait wait wait! There's a lot of problems alright! How could we possibly return the goods we spent so much time and effort to procure! What do you want us to do huh!"

Lu Bu very quickly agreed but Zhou Cang was clearly displeased and refuted her in the same rough tone as before.

"Hmph, what a bunch of fools. I can't believe they're having internal conflict at this time." Chen Gong scoffed, and her severe expression loosened up a little.

I wasn't feeling any better as both sides were ordinary citizens after all and they were fighting viciously over a pitiful amount of provisions.

It really is tragic.

I looked over at Guan Ping and saw that she was frowning.

"Guan Ping? What's the matter?"

"Eh? Oh, I was just thinking back to when Zhou Cang first came to ask for provisions. Their attitude was poor and so we ended up fighting." Guan Ping shifted the sabre hanging by her waist and looked at Zhou Cang with a friendly gaze, "It would be nice if both sides could sit down and discuss this peacefully, whether or not this issue can be solved."

Sit down and discuss huh...

"I apologise, I'm spouting nonsense again." Guan Ping felt that what she said was too idealistic and hurriedly tried to retract her words.

"No, that could be a good idea."

If you think about it, negotiations may be the best way to resolve this peacefully. Firstly, a

solution may actually emerge from negotiations; and secondly, we don't need to guard against the possibility of that Chen Gong fellow who might attack us anyway.

And so, I took a deep breath—

“Lord Lu Bu! Capture Zhou Cang now!”

I immediately twisted my arms and escaped from my bindings as I yelled out. Liao Hua understood my intent and followed suit as well.

Sometimes, negotiations have to be forced after all.

Chapter 11: Don't tell me this is a long journey (7)

Yun Chang POV

To summarise what happened, we were able to easily capture Chen Gong who was caught completely unawares. The surrounding militia were all shocked, and some actually charged up and tried to save Chen Gong but Liao Hua was able to stop the human flow in time so we remained in control of the situation.

On the other side, Lu Bu had an even easier time. It seems like that Zhou Cang fellow had acceded to Lu Bu and Zhou Cang actually stopped her troops calmly from trying to save her when Lu Bu captured her.

I then ordered Chen Gong to return her people to the village town, and for Zhou Cang to get her people to withdraw as well, leaving only the 2 leaders of each side and our people. After discussing with Lu Bu, we decided on our beachside camp as the negotiation point and separately headed there.

Chen Gong wasn't someone we could lower our guard against so Liao Hua and I maintained vigilance along the way back. After we caught a few scouts, Chen Gong finally relented and ordered them to all withdraw.

"I'm really impressed at you lot. To think you actually managed to capture the overall commanders of both sides at once. I don't think there's ever been such a precedence." Chen Gong was still calm as ever, but her voice lacked a fair bit of the usual steel.

"But now can you finally see that we aren't with the refugees?"

"Indeed, I must concede that point," Chen Gong sighed and then turned to me, "Then why do you lot have to do such troublesome things if you're not with them?!"

I smiled when I heard this and looked at Liao Hua, who had a similarly hateful expression as Chen Gong. She looked at Chen Gong and slowly said, "Wasn't it you who got us involved?"

When she finished, Liao Hua walked over to Chen Gong and began to search her.

"Oi oi! You— Ah~ What are you trying to do?!"

"Find my whetstone and books.

"How could I possibly be carrying those things~"

Chen Gong began to moan as she was felt by Liao Hua in a complete turnaround from her attitude before and after a while, she began to gasp with a reddened face. I didn't think that Chen Gong had so many ticklish spots.

(TL: MC isn't the only dense one...)

As for whether Liao Hua was actually finding her things, I felt that I shouldn't ask about this, and just walked behind them and smiled.

When we returned back to camp, I saw that Lu Bu and the rest were already back and they saluted us from afar.

"Big sis~"

"Sister Guan, this disappearance of yours really worried us."

When they saw us, Gan Qing and Mi Zhen came up to welcome us. I didn't see Hua Tuo but she should probably still be sleeping at this time.

"Lord Guan Yu got sucked in as expected."

"After being by our lord (Liu Bei)'s side for so long, it looks like you have gained the ability to get entangled with troublesome things."

Lu Bu and Wen Yuan said sarcastically when they saw how bedraggled I was.

Wang! Red Hare too barked when it saw me.

Do you have to say that the moment you see me? And you even said it as if it was a matter of fact.

"Give me a break you 2. I'm exhausted in both body and mind." I said as I rubbed Red Hare's furry head, and wondered just how did this all come about.

"Is your big brother a god of misfortune?"

Don't be misled, Liao Hua!

But instead of this, the more critical issue at hand is how to solve the Chen Gong-Zhou Cang conundrum.

I turned and saw that Chen Gong and Zhou Cang were sitting at a table across each other. Zhou Cang looked grim while Chen Gong was calm and composed.

Now then...

I steeled myself and stepped into the camp, but just as I placed 1 foot in, the 2 of them started bickering.

"Negotiations are of no use whatsoever when you refugees are so vile. It's the truth that you committed robbery so what else is there to say?"

"Refugees too have their dignity. Not only have you not shown compassion to us, you even speak to us coldly and arrogantly as though we are your inferiors! How can we possibly cross the Yellow River if we don't have boats and 3 days' worth of provisions! Are you telling us to

die then?!”

As Zhou Cang said so, her agitated movements made the table knock against Chen Gong’s leg with a *bang*. Chen Gong’s expression did not waver, and she just stared coldly at Zhou Cang.

It’s a very difficult problem to deal with. On one hand, what Chen Gong has done is right by the laws and by her responsibilities. On the other hand, what Zhou Cang did was to secure her survival, and was her last resort after all.

They’re all just people trying to live in these troubled times.

“General Guan, I’m interested to see how you are going to solve this problem.”

Liao Hua came up close behind me and whispered to my ear. Her gaze was cold, but this did not differ from how she usually was.

Since I’ve been exposed to this problem, I must do something about it. Ignoring the problem would go against the path I seek to follow.

And so, I sat between the both of them and calmly drank the water placed on the table before I began to slowly speak, “I understand that both sides have their difficulties and it’s impossible for me to solve this alone with just my tongue. I would however like to understand the situation so please, Zhou Cang, tell me how many refugees you have? And Chen Gong, how much stores do you have?”

“I have many with me. Including the old, frail and other non-combatants, I have 3,000 odd in total. Apart from the 1,000 odd combatants with me, I’ve placed the rest in a location behind the mountains for now. The provisions we came with are almost depleted and if this goes on, people will starve to death within a week!”

She got more and more agitated as she went on and only stopped and withdrew when I yelled at her.

“And your side, Chen Gong?”

“Nothing! I do not even have a single spare grain for the refugees!” Chen Gong was just as enraged as Zhou Cang and slammed the table as she stood up with a stormy look, “My village too has about 3,000 or so people. We only just planted the seeds for winter planting and I’m expecting a harvest failure next year so we need 3 months’ worth of stores!”

Looks like Chen Gong’s side is under tremendous pressure as well.

“At the end of the day you’re still going to get me to give these people provisions right?! Or are you asking me to take them in?!” Chen Gong pressed closer as she said so, “If we lend them a month’s worth of provisions and our harvest turns out to be a failure, won’t we end up as wandering refugees as well? Who will save us then?!”

“Can’t you just take some in! I’m willing to leave with the rest!”

“Absolutely not! How do I know if any amongst you lot carry any diseases?! What if an epidemic breaks out after a few months?! What do I do then!”

“You bastard!” Zhou Cang went up to hit Chen Gong as she yelled out.

“So you’re resorting to violence when you lose in reason! So much for manners!”

I wasn’t able to stop Zhou Cang in time but Chen Gong was able to quickly dodge the attack by bending backwards.

As Chen Gong stepped back, her skirt lifted and revealed 2 wooden blocks at her feet.

This is... Could they be wooden shoes to enhance her height...

“Ah!!!” When Chen Gong saw that her wooden shoes were revealed, she immediately screamed, in contrast to how calm she usually was, and hurriedly leapt on top of her wooden shoes to hide them.

We saw it already.

“Ah, un... Sorry.” Zhou Cang was at a loss as to what to do when she saw this and stood in a daze for a long while before she apologised and returned tp her seat.

Looking at her, her actual height should probably be only about 1.4m or so.

Eh, everyone has their weaknesses I guess.

But I should seize this opportunity and think of something.

At times like these, what would big brother do?

...

So it’s that huh.

“I got it.” I thought for a moment before nodding and looking at the 2 people at my sides.

Chen Gong was still blushing while Zhou Cang was frowning as her side was in more precarious circumstances.

I don’t know if what I’m going to do is right but I’ve decided I should do it–

“I’d like to ask the 2 of you. Would you both be willing to go down to Dong commandery and Runan?”

Chapter 12: Don't tell me this is a long journey (8)

Yun Chang POV

Ever since I've been roaming about the Central Plains with big brother, recruitment of troops has always been left to him. After we arrived in Xu state, and the Xu state 3 joined us, it has been left to them. Though recruitment efforts have not ceased, big brother doesn't seem to be too concerned about growing our army size.

When we fought Yuan Shu, Lord Cao Cao had lent us troops. Back then, Wen Yuan had suggested tp big brother that we should try to get them to switch sides and join us for real but big brother turned this down. Even when we left Xu state, he left all of the Xu state garrison to Lord Chen Deng and we somehow managed to break through Lord Cao Cao's trap with just the 2,000 or so of our own troops.

Perhaps big brother doesn't want to have too many troops but I still feel that big brother would have done as I have.

"Please come in." I yelled out as I thought so, and Chen Gong and Zhou Cang who were here to meet me came in.

It's been 2 days since they left after the negotiations concluded. I was still afraid that something might happen or that they would regret their decision and do something rash but now with the 2 of them before me, all my worries dissipated into nothingness.

"Have you accounted for everyone?"

"Un, we've settled on the respective groups." "I really didn't expect that things would end this way."

Zhou Cang frowned, turning the face that attracted everyone into one that more resembled that of a mean-looking burly man while Chen Gong had an unrelenting look as usual and folded her arms while she looked to the side.

"And are you both ready to leave?"

"Un, that has been my intention from the very beginning." "I am if what you promised is true."

Of course it is.

As I stepped out, they both parted to make way for me. As I walked up to the entrance of the tent, I exhaled and slowly parted the curtains, letting in the rays of the afternoon sun which were so piercing that I had to cover my eyes with my hands.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

On the other side of my hand were an uncountable number of troops standing there and shouting towards me.

These troops weren't the Imperial Chancellor's, nor did they belong to any Governor.

They were now ours.

"How many is this?"

"We have 2,000." "... 2,000 here as well."

So we have 4,000 in total? A few days' provisions alone would be quite a significant expense.

"That idea of yours is really great, Yun Chang. Not only have you solved the problem of a lack of food, you've also increased our army manifold."

Just then, Wen Yuan came over with a jovial smile and rolled up her sleeves before putting her hands around my neck and twirling about.

My idea might not be the best but it was something that could work.

Chen Gong's village town and Zhou Cang's refugees numbered 3,000 or so for each group while Chen Gong's stores were only just enough to support its population.

Instead of making both sides unhappy, I felt that it would be better to bring some along and settle them elsewhere. If I bring them to where big brother is, he probably won't mind taking them in.

As for Chen Gong and Zhou Cang, both of them have indicated that they wish to come along as well. Zhou Cang was worried about the people who have followed her this far while Chen Gong wanted to come along after she heard that big brother is a royal relative...

"Excuse me ms general, is your lord really the Imperial Uncle of the present Son of Heaven?"

"Un, my lord even got appointed the Governor of Yu state when he was recognised as a royal relative during his first Court session... Though I don't recall him doing much."

"Oh my oh my, he got a state Governor appointment just by being recognised as a royal relative! Looks like my future is secured."

Chen Gong didn't trust me and went to ask Lu Bu. When she heard Lu Bu answer, she exclaimed as she clapped and nodded her head, and seemed to be interested in big brother even though she hadn't met him yet. But really, she's thinking about her path to future promotions already?

Wang!!!

"Eek!"

"Good boy~ Good boy~"

Red Hare clearly didn't like this girl who was infatuated with officialdom though.

"Wen Yuan, has everyone been accounted for?"

"Un, I've got a count for everyone already." Wen Yuan said as she took a piece of paper out from her pocket and began reading from it, "620 cavalry, 1,820 footmen, 640 bowmen. The rest are non-combatants. Some are family members of the troops while the remainder are those who have heard of our lord's exploits and have joined us willingly."

So big brother's name has spread all the way south huh. I suppose it makes sense since ordinary citizens who have endured such hardships will want to join a kind and compassionate feudal lord.

I felt like I was put in a spot. Troops were fine, and I don't mind being held back by non-combatants but I was afraid that they would hold back big brother one day.

But if it's big brother, he'll probably say that he doesn't mind.

Really, being a compassionate ruler is so difficult in the beginning. There are too many things a compassionate ruler can't put down after all.

"Why did you laugh, Lord Guan Yu?" Zhou Cang asked as she looked at me.

I clapped Zhou Cang's shoulders, which made her stare at me even more intensely, and I couldn't help but laugh. "It's nothing, I just felt that I picked a rather difficult route just as Liao Hua said."

"Achoo~" In the distance, I saw Liao Hua grieve a big sneeze as she was reorganising the combined army.

Before we left, we went through the village town so that those who came along with us could give those who stayed a final farewell. I and Lu Bu rode at the head while the new cavalry rode behind us, followed by Wen Yuan, Zhou Cang and Chen Gong who led a mixed contingent comprising the footmen and bowmen. With Wen Yuan around, those 2 probably won't fight so much. Further back was Liao Hua and the girls, as well as our supply caravan which carried about 5 days' worth of food borrowed from the village town.

Yes, that's right, borrow. Which means it has to be returned. I proposed this to which Chen Gong was very supportive.

As we entered the village town, we found that the refugees have integrated with the original inhabitants. Unlike before where they were at odds with each other, they were now communicating and living with each other amicably.

If you put aside the problem of provisions, perhaps both groups could have lived together harmoniously from the beginning.

But I really don't get it. Why are there so many who are willing to follow us? What is it about us that draws them to us?

"Lord Guan Yu~~ Lord Guan Yu~~" Just then, the sound of horse hooves coming my way could be heard.

"Lord Guan Yu!!!"

"Eh? Guan Ping?! You're coming along too?"

"Un, I don't have any family here anyway."

Guan Ping had changed out of her tattered clothing and was wearing a set of plain, clean green cloth robed that was just right for the season. The pouches by her horse were empty.

"Ah, I've been going through some hard times lately so I don't have anything to eat this week besides that bisuit which I accidentally ate in 1 mouth just now..."

(TL: How the heck does she develop breasts if she doesn't have enough to eat?!)

"Here." I didn't wait for her to finish and took out a strip of dried meat and stuffed it into Guan Ping's mouth.

"Eh?"

"I don't have much meat with me but our journey is short anyway so have some."

"... I'll give you some of mine as well." Lu Bu said as she took out a piece of dried meat and passed it to Guan Ping. Though she doesn't show it at all on the surface, Lu Bu's kindness really shows itself at times like these.

"... I'm really, really thankful to both of you," It was only 2 pieces of dried meat but it was enough to move Guan Ping to tears. Even though she got accustomed to it, it was still a little too much hardship after all.

"We're both descendants of the Guan line so you can think of me as your own family from now on."

I'm not sure how much help I can be to her, but if it's just to be an emotional support for her, then I'm more than willing.

"Un, we're family, we're family." Guan Ping did her best to stop her tears and wiped her face before she continued, "I'll think of you as my own mother then."

"Eh?"

Mother? Shouldn't it be sisters?

"Pu~" Lu Bu let out a very rarely seen chuckle.

"Lord Lu Bu can be my godmother."

"..." In an instant, the sound of a temple vein bursting could be heard.

"Haha, hahahaha~" I couldn't hold back my laughter as I looked at Lu Bu's expression.

"Lord Guan Yu, can you watch your image? Don't forget that I'm the godmother while you're the mother."

Hmph, so petty.

Ah... The glaive in my hands dropped from my hand when it loosened for a moment as I laughed.

Looks like I'll have to dismount and pick it up. Or so I thought, when all of a sudden a porcelain white hand easily picked up the glaive that was about to hit the ground.

"Eh? Zhou Cang?"

"Lord Guan Yu, please let me stay by your side. I cannot stay with Lord Zhang Liao."

Un? Why is she saying this all of a sudden?

"I don't know why but Lord Zhang Liao keeps touching me all over. I'm a little scared by it and I hate it!"

"Un~ I can understand why."

She's really attractive after all but it's a pity that she is such a rough and masculine fellow inside.

"What did you say, Lord Guan Yu?"

"No, nothing." Perhaps I'm just a little jealous, "Then you can march with the vanguard. If anyone behind asks why, just say that I pulled a muscle in my right arm and can't carry my blade."

"Oh, un!" You don't need to shout at the top of your voice when you're answering me...

Just like that, after spending a fair amount of time in this unnamed village town, we continued on our journey with some new companions.

After we looked at the map closely, we found that there was 1 more stopover before we reached Runan. A place called Gucheng.

Chapter 13: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Yi De (1)

Yun Chang POV

Advancing with troops and advancing normally is completely different. I'd had a vague impression of how troublesome it was but I'd never been in charge of logistics before so I wasn't prepared for how troublesome it would be.

Especially when we stopped to rest and eat.

"Lord Guan, may I ask how many people can each cauldron cook for? And how much rice should be apportioned for each cauldron? Our cauldrons are not uniform so we need have a new standard for this."

"Lord Guan, a few sections in 1 of the newly formed platoons have gotten into a fight, please come and take a look."

"Lord Guan, may I ask how long more do we have to go? Some of the people have begun to complain."

A continuous rapid fire stream of questions came at me at which I really couldn't handle at all as these weren't questions which I had answers to immediately. All our previous armies were rather well-established and had their own basic rules and standards to follow so everything went smoothly. But now that we are starting from ground up, it's a little too much to handle.

This is probably what it means to intensively develop something.

"So embarrassing, Lord Guan Yu~" Chen Gong gave a 'hmph when she saw sweat streaming down my face and walked over with her hands behind her backs to the soldiers with issues and began to resolve them. As expected of a provincial magistrate, her help is really appreciated here.

But it's a pity she's so infatuated with officialdom.

"Heaven!!! General of Heaven!!!!"

"Shh! Don't call me that!!"

Un? A very emotionally-charged exclamation came from elsewhere. I turned and saw Zhou Cang prostrating before Hua Tuo and kowtowing profusely.

What's going on?

I feel like something's not right and hurriedly ran up to them and asked them what happened, "Zhou Cang, what are you doing?"

"Sister Guan, you're finally here. Please save me." Hua Tuo seemed to be very relieved

when she saw me, “Please... Ah! Stop grabbing the hem of my skirt, my robes are going to be pulled off soon.”

“The General of Heaven still lives! We all thought you were dead!” Zhou Cang tearfully cried out as she tightly held onto Hua Tuo and refused to let go. When you look at her, it’s almost like a caricature of a wife who is tearfully hanging on to her husband who is taking the place of his father in the draft.

But did she say the General of Heaven? — Ah! I almost forgot... Hua Tuo has always been living under the name of Zhang Jue.

“Hua Tuo, could it be that...”

Was Zhou Cang a Yellow Turban before?

“Probably.” Hua Tuo nodded, and then she frowned, “But I don’t know this person as the Yellow Turbans operate as a marauding force after all. Many comrades in the south were defeated and dispersed before they could meet up with us.”

No impression huh...

“By the way Hua Tuo, I’m standing over here. That’s a sandstone formation.”

“Ah ah ah! Sorry.” Hua Tuo apologised as she deeply bowed.

But looking at how Hua Tuo is like, she probably can’t recognise her even if she did knew her before.

“But why is the General of Heaven here? Could you be planning to use these peoples’ strength to revive the Yellow Turbans? C, c, could it be that our army will become the Yellow Turban army soon?!”

There’s no way that’s happening.

“No no no, no way of that happening at all.” Hua Tuo shook her head so vigorously it seemed like she was like a rattling doll while her hands swung up and down rhythmically as well.

“Then, then this is...”

“Un, how do I put it? I’ve left the Yellow Turban army. That’s all.”

“Eh?”

“Please don’t call me by that title anymore. The General of Heaven of the Yellow Turbans is already dead and the one standing before you is someone called Hua Tuo.”

Hua Tuo, you’re not looking at her at all.

"I see, so the Yellow Turbans have failed huh..." Zhou Cang didn't seem to mind and was more preoccupied with a painful regret as she slammed her fist on the ground.

But to think there was someone with this level of loyalty in the Yellow Turbans huh. And she was committed to being responsible for the refugees from the very beginning. She really is someone huh.

Well, she's definitely much better compared to Chen Gong.

"Don't be too sad, Zhou Cang. There will always be things that are lost. It's like this in troubled times." I said as I clapped Zhou Cang's shoulders.

Zhou Cang sank into silence as she knelt on the ground before nodding after a long while. She sighed and sat on the ground.

"I'm really sorry about just now. When I saw the General of, ah no, Lord Hua Tuo, I got too emotional." Zhou Cang rubbed her eyes before she continued, "I've always admired Lord Hua Tuo. Even though she's tiny, weak and powerless, she's always appeared before us as the General of Heaven."

"That's a little too overboard..." Hua Tuo smiled stiffly, and then squinted as she looked ahead before finding Zhou Cang's shoulder with some difficulty, "But you're right. I am indeed weak and powerless. But in my head, I hold the knowledge by which I can save people with. You're in charge of killing while I'm in charge of saving. I think that's where my path lies."

Hua Tuo flashed an innocent smile when she finished. Indeed, to dedicate oneself to saving lives in troubled times is probably an arduous path to follow.

"Lord Guan Yu..."

Un? I turned around when I heard someone call me and saw Lu Bu with an irritated look.

"What's the matter, Lord Lu Bu?"

"Someone's here."

Eh? What does she mean?

"You look like you're doing well. Not only did you manage to hack and slash your way through, you've even managed to gather this many troops?" Just as Lu Bu finished, a familiar high-pitched voice could be heard from afar.

"Eh? General Xiahou Dun?"

Lu Bu stepped aside, and revealed a one-eyed girl with an eyepatch who came forward. Just from her standing there, I could feel her domineering aura.

She was bringing a horse by the reins with her, and some troops were behind her. As she

walked forward, she swept back her hair that had become messy from the ride.

"You're pretty quick huh. It took several days and nights of continuous travel to get here," Her eyes gleamed when she said so, but I wasn't sure if it was out of animosity.

At this, I hurriedly saluted her and wondered if she was here because we slew Lord Cao Cao's subordinate generals. But if Lord Cao Cao wished to pursue the matter, she could have done so long ago.

"Hmmm, feels like there are quite a few new faces amongst the subordinate generals huh..." Xiahou Dun looked at Zhou Cang and Chen Gong, who was presently concentrating on resolving the troops' problems. Guan Ping and Liao Hua weren't here presently as they were in the rearguard with the girls.

I wonder what she would think if she saw Liao Hua who switched sides.

"We were in a hurry to cross the passes before and did so without the permit so we seek General Xiahou Dun's understanding about this."

Whatever the case, it's best to admit our mistakes first.

"No, that's water under the bridge. Please don't be so uptight, Lord Guan Yu. This is my usual demeanor." Xiahou Dun relaxed her expression when she saw a look of seriousness on me, "I'm just here to collect the permit."

"Eh? Collect the permit?"

"Un, we've notified any cities you may pass through from here on so even if you don't have the permit you can pass. We can't have you hold on to the permit as it doesn't have an expiry date after all."

I understand where they're coming from, and so I took out the piece of silk from my pocket and handed it to Xiahou Dun.

"You could have saved the trouble and left this sort of thing to the gatekeeper general."

"I just wanted to see how you were all doing. The Imperial Chancellor herself is very interested as well." Xiahou Dun kept the permit as she said so and continued with her hands on her hips and a bright expression on her face, "It's of no good to us whatsoever, but it's nice to see that Lord Guan Yu is doing pretty well."

Doing pretty well huh... I've had quite a bit of trouble along the way actually, I thought but didn't say this.

"Is Yuan Rang here?"

"Oh? Long time no see, Wen Yuan."

Wen Yuan seemed to have put down everything on hand and rushed over when she heard

that Xiahou Dun had came here, and when she saw her, she ran up and hugged her.

“...”

“Ah—”

And immediately, Xiahou Dun reflexively threw Wen Yuan over her shoulder by her sleeve.

“Sorry! Wen Yuan, I did it instinctively again!” Xiahou Dun began to apologise while she clapped her hands together and bowed when she saw that she had thrown Wen Yuan mercilessly.

“It’s alright it’s alright~ It’s me who forgot.”

Everyone secretly knows that Xiahou Dun is afraid of pain and it is because of that fear which has led to her sheer martial prowess borne out of intensive training. And so, just touching her back will incite an instinctive attack.

“Oi, you better be careful.” Lu Bu let out a strange guttural sound as though she were about to go wild and lose reason when she saw her subordinate general get thrown.

Looks like she cares for Wen Yuan as expected huh.

“It’s alright it’s alright, I was careless.” Wen Yuan hurriedly explained when she saw this.

And Xiahou Dun went to help Wen Yuan up as well after she tidied the red scarf around her neck.

“Un...” Only then did Lu Bu exhale as though she was letting out the tension inside her and return to normal.

“So where are you all headed to?”

“Un, we are planning to head to Gucheng for a short break since it’s just up ahead.”

“Gucheng county huh. I heard that there’s a new magistrate sent there recently. Apart from that, I don’t know much else.” Xiahou Dun mounted her horse in 1 swift movement as she said so, “But since we’ve notified every city, you can rest easy and go ahead since she should know about you all.”

“Un, I understand. Thanks General Xiahou Dun.” I nodded and saluted.

“Will you be leaving now?”

“Yes, I have to go over to Ji state immediately. The Xianbei have infringed our borders and Meng De and Lord Yuan Shao are quite concerned about this so Meng De has sent me to deal with them.”

“Please take care then.”

"When I return and we get the chance again, let's have a spar."

"Yes, let's."

"Un, when we have the chance. But I won't be sparring with Lord Lu Bu since the difference between us is a little too big." Xiahou Dun smiled and saluted before leaving.

"Guan Yu, I have some issues here... Un? What's everyone looking at?" Just then, Chen Gong came over and looked about, feeling puzzled at where we were all looking at, "Was someone here just now?"

"Un, a general called Xiahou Dun." Zhou Cang said with an impressed look to Chen Gong.

"Oh, I see. Speaking of which, Guan Yu, I have some numbers here which relate to our resources."

Looks like Chen Gong isn't too interested. But the path she walks is an administrative one after all.

It was night by the time we reached Gucheng city.

"May I ask if the Administrator is around? We are Guan Yu's group which has come from the north and we would like to borrow some lodgings as it's dark out~~~"

It was me who decided to let Zhou Cang who was much louder than me do the shouting but I didn't think about telling her what to say and she completely neglected to word it in a manner that was more polite.

After a short while, a small figure appeared at the city tower.

"I have learnt of this and permit you to enter the city and borrow lodgings here."

Only after I heard this was I able to rest easy. I've had too many experiences of being rejected at the gates after all. But why do I feel like this voice is so familiar?

Just then, the small figure took a torch and looked at us below. At the same time, the torch lit up her face as well. It was a little far but I could clearly see what she looked like. Her small face, her well-defined features, and that forceful countenance.

Most importantly, she held a Serpent Spear that was even taller than she was.

In an instant, my mind went blank, and tears flooded my eyes as my body nearly collapsed from relief.

And so, I slowly closed my eyes and let my tears stream down. Words swam in my throat but all that came out repeatedly was a weak 'little sister'.

Big brother, I've finally found her—

Our little sister, Zhang Fei Zhang Yi De.

Chapter 14: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Yi De (2)

Yun Chang POV

After we entered Gucheng city and settled our troops, Liao Hua and the rest retired for the night while I told Lu Bu and Wen Yuan of what I saw and after some discussions, we decided to meet the Administrator at once.

And so we were led to a guest lounge in the city tower where we waited for almost an hour. As time went by, my heart began to thump harder.

"Yun Chang, are you sure that it's Lord Zhang Fei?" Wen Yuan expressed her doubts with a difficult expression as she sat opposite me.

"Un, I'm sure. That voice and that face is definitely Yi De."

"Actually, I too have felt that." Lu Bu, who sat beside me, nodded resolutely as well. I didn't think that Lu Bu, who didn't usually speak much, would have a good memory for people.

"The city guard on the far end looks exactly like that lass Yi De."

"... No, we're talking about the Administrator."

I retract what I said about Lu Bu.

"Let's take a step back and let's say she is Lord Zhang Fei. It doesn't work out no matter how you think about it." Wen Yuan leaned forward as she said so and frowned, "If she is Lord Zhang Fei then why is she here as a county official? How did Lord Zhang Fei make it all the way here back when we were separated at Xu state?"

"That's..." I was about to rebut her but now that I think about it, what Wen Yuan said makes sense, "Could it be that Yi De conquered this place? It's not very big and from how it looks, it should be easy to conquer. As long as she hides her traces, it's possible to escape detection by Lord Cao Cao."

"But if she did, then didn't she react at all when she heard us?"

"That's..."

Yes, if she knew we had come, then she would have leapt off the city tower.

Could she have some reason to hide herself?

"What's the point of thinking so much, you 2? If it's Lord Zhang Fei then that's good. If we have any doubts, we can clear them up when we meet, no? Hai~~~" Lu Bu was tired from kneeling and leaned back and lay down on the floor.

But she's right, we are only frustrating ourselves needlessly. Moreover, there is also the

possibility that I wrongly recognised her since the distance between us then was fairly large after all.

"My lords, the Administrator has arrived."

When we heard this, all 3 of us stiffened and hurriedly got into a proper sitting position. Lu Bu was the most nervous and actually lost balance and fell onto me.

Ta... *Ta...

She's here.

My heart thumped ever harder when I heard her footsteps.

"My lords, I happened to have quite a few matters to attend to tonight which has made my arrival late. I seek your forgiveness for this."

In the next instant, a clear voice that was identical to Yi De's came from outside the room. All of us inside looked at the entrance when we heard the voice.

That clothing, that figure, that face; everything is the same as Yi De. No, what I should say is, that person is undoubtedly my little sister Yi De.

"*Shiku*..."

"... I can't believe it."

When they saw her, Wen Yuan and Lu Bu's eyes bulged in disbelief at the sight before them.

"May I ask what's with my face?" Yi De asked with a smile.

"M, may I ask, are you Zhang Fei Zhang Yi De?"

"Un, indeed I am. Is there any problem?" Yi De very quickly nodded as she said so, and looked surprised.

"... Yi De."

"Un?"

I could no longer hold back the impulse in me and slowly stood up as I walked towards Yi De. I rushed forward in spite of my legs which were numb from sitting for too long and embraced her.

I thought I'd never get to see her again but here we are.

Perhaps the oath between the 3 of us then tied our fates together and enabled us to find each other again. I know that Yi De seems independent but she's still a kid inside. How could she not feel lonely after getting separated from everyone?

My tears fell as I thought so. I thought I'd never shed tears ever again in my life, or at least if I had to, it would be when nobody is around. But I couldn't hold back my tears at all as I walked towards Yi De.

It was weak of me but I was overjoyed inside because I felt blessed to be able to find my little sister again. I could already picture the 3 of us together again, with everyone else.

Our family is finally together again. Yi De, your sister is right here in front of you.



"Umm, I'd like to ask." Yi De tilted her head slightly as she looked at me and said, "Have I met the 3 of you somewhere before?"

...

“Eh?”

Yi De’s reaction gave me a shock and I could only make a weak sound in reply. As I looked at Yi De, I only just realised that her expression when she was looking at us was as if she was looking at 3 strangers.

“Umm, Lord Zhang Fei, what is the meaning of this?” Wen Yuan began to get angry at this question and stood up as she walked over to this side, “We have been comrades ever since we fought together in the feudal lord alliance. You and Yun Chang, and our lord, are even sworn siblings.”

“Though you’re quite irritating sometimes, but you’re still a good kid all in all. None of us would ever treat you as a stranger either.” Lu Bu frowned and looked extremely puzzled. She then brought out Red Hare from her chest and held it up, “Could it be that you don’t even recognise Red Hare anymore?”

Wang! When Red Hare saw Yi De, it jumped out of Lu Bu’s hands and ran straight to Yi De’s feet and began to grab the hem of Yi De’s clothing with its tiny paws.

“U, umm, I really don’t know what’s going on.” However, Yi De was bewildered at us, and her eyes wavered between the 3 of us, “As I asked before, who are you 3?”

“Eh?”

Who are you 3?

Who?

Do you have to ask that...

“What’s wrong with you? I’m your 2nd sister!” I yelled as I grabbed Yi De’s shoulders, hoping that I could make her snap out of it.

“Please don’t get physical.” Yi De shifted her body and put in strength into her arms as she broke free of my grasp.

I had more to say but when I saw the flames of rage in Yi De’s eyes, I got a shock and was at a loss as to what I should do.

“As I said before, I don’t know who you are. I received orders to let you into the city and borrow lodgings but if you have any other designs then don’t blame me if I respond with force.”

After we were driven out by Yi De, we returned to the inn where we were putting up at. None of us could sleep so we went to the room where Hua Tuo and the rest were residing in.

“Why did she not recognise you all? To think we finally found her after so long.”

When she heard about what happened, Gan Qing covered her mouth in shock and looked like she was about to cry.

“Could my eyes be failing me? Could she actually not be Yi De?”

“... No, we heard her admit it herself. It’s impossible to have 2 people who look the same and have the same name.” Wen Yuan said as she held her hair with her hands.

“That’s right, she didn’t even recognise Red Hare.” Lu Bu was visibly down as well, and was absentmindedly combing Red Hare’s fur.

As for me, I was so shocked, sad and hurt that I didn’t even have the strength to speak. As I sat on the stool in the corner, I sighed. I couldn’t open my eyes and all that filled my head was Yi De’s bewildered look.

Why...

“Don’t be sad, big sis Guan.” Just then, Mi Zhen slowly came over and grabbed my sleeve as she looked at me with innocent eyes that hoped I could feel better.

“Un, I’m okay.” I said as I smiled as Mi Zhen and rubbed her head.

But in my heart, I still couldn’t get over it.

“Could she have...” Just then, Hua Tuo who had been silent all this while began to slowly speak up with a severe expression, “Could she have lost her memories?”

“Lost her memories?” All of us asked with 1 voice.

“Un, she might have suffered from some sort of trauma or injury that has resulted in loss of some of her memories.”

“That can’t be possible right?”

“... No, it’s possible.” I suddenly remembered, “Back then, Yi De escaped into the mountains and she may have met with an accident there.”

“Isn’t that a little too convenient?”

“That’s a little...”

Yes, this theory makes sense but it’s difficult to swallow.

“In any case, I’ll go with you 3 again to meet Lord Zhang Fei again.” Hua Tuo said resolutely as she stood up, “At that time, try to speak with her more but don’t agitate her. I want to see what memories she still has.”

“... Un.” I nodded after a moment. Wen Yuan and Lu Bu also agreed to the proposal.

And so, everyone all went back to their rooms to sleep as we would have to get up early tomorrow.

“Yun Chang, my lord, are you both asleep?”

“... Not yet.”

“How could I sleep under such circumstances?”

After we returned to our room, the 3 of us still couldn’t sleep.

“What do we do tomorrow?”

No one had an answer to this question.

To be honest, I was hesitant about following through with the plan tomorrow as I was afraid of seeing a strange Yi De. I don’t know what sort of face I should put on when meeting my sworn sister who was now a stranger.

Did she really forget all the memories we had together?

Big brother, what should I do? If big brother were here, what he do?

Chapter 15: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Yi De (3)

Yun Chang POV

We'd been travelling for a long while now and winter has almost passed yet the chilly cold still remained, making it difficult for one not to curl up at night.

It was very quiet in the room, and after a long struggle, Lu Bu's snoring and Wen Yuan's unique sleep muttering could be heard.

I was trying fervently to sleep but this was undoubtedly difficult. This wasn't because of the noise that the others were making but because of what happened a few hours earlier which continued to replay in my mind.

I forced my eyes open against the tiredness as every time I closed my eyes, tears would fill them, and so I rubbed my eyes to force my sleep away.

Weak rays of sunlight were already shining in through the windows and the inn was dyed a dark purple. Even though it was winter, I could hear the chirping of some unknown birds.

I should get up. And find Yi De right away.

And so I woke everyone up and went to the guest lounge where I pleaded for a long while with the Administrator's aide before he was willing to bring us to see Yi De.

"You're Lord Hua Tuo huh? It's good to meet you."

"Ah ah, un."

Hua Tuo blinked a few times when Yi De reached out to Hua Tuo before she regained her senses and stretched her hand out to take Yi De's.

Hua Tuo's expression showed that she probably still harboured some hope that there was some misunderstanding somewhere.

I too thought the same a while ago.

"Umm, Lord Zhang Fei, we were too rude yesterday." I bowed as I expressed my apologies to Yi De.

"Oi..." Wen Yuan was surprised at what I was doing but since Yi De doesn't know me now, if I insist on acting like how we usually are, I'll probably alarm her instead.

And so, I've decided to accept the reality before me for now.

"No no, I was a little too rash yesterday as well." Yi De said with an exemplary official smile as she sat at the head of the table, "I was a little perturbed when you 3 acted like you knew me very well. Ah, please have some tea."

“Ah, thanks.” I nodded at the servant who brought tea to the table and drank as I looked at Yi De from the corner of my eye.

Looks like it wasn’t my misconception. The Yi De now doesn’t have the innocent, energetic and childish aura at all. After just a few months, it feels like she’s become a dependable and mature person.

I’m really not used to this Yi De.

“And what are you all here today? If it’s supplies then I can only provide about 10 days’ worth as we are only a small county city after all.”

“No, we don’t want for supplies...”

“Un, then that’s—”

“Umm!”

The topics for discussion that we came with were almost over and we hadn’t drawn out any important information yet. But all of a sudden, someone barged in with staggering footsteps and yelled out as she raised her hand.

“Umm, can I ask if you have someone above looking out for you seeing as you became a county official at such a young age?”

Chen Gong?! Why is Chen Gong here?

“How could you not tell me that you’re meeting the Administrator? Are you that afraid I’ll overshadow you lot?”

“Wu... Chen Gong!”

“What~” She shot back with a face that looked as though we were the ones in the wrong.

Having such a fellow come out of nowhere all of a sudden threw me into complete disarray.

“You wanted to ask my experiences, is that it?” Just then, Yi De spoke up with a smile after drinking some tea, “Actually I’m not too sure about what I’ve done. I’ll be honest here. I seemed to have sustained an injury a while ago.”

“Eh? An injury?!”

I didn’t think that Chen Gong would yield the answer to the question that we wanted to ask the most.

Chen Gong, you may be infatuated with officialdom, but I’m still grateful to you.

“May I ask where you sustained this injury?” Hua Tuo hurriedly went up to Yi De and asked.

"Ah, un. The back of the head. What's the matter?"

"Un, as I expected." Hua Tuo said as she held her chin with her hands in her sleeves and nodded.

"... As I asked, what's the matter?"

"No, nothing." Hua Tuo shook her head and placed her hands which were slightly trembling on her legs as she asked again, "By the way, how long has Lord Zhang Fei served in Gucheng?"

"It's been quite a while." Yi De seemed to be a little melancholic when she heard this question, "I've been here since the Yellow Turban Rebellion began."

Eh?

"How could that be, you were clearly..."

"Wen Yuan."

"Don't stop— Ah, ow!"

Wen Yuan got a little too agitated at Yi De's words and made to stand up to do something but Lu Bu grabbed on to her sleeve and when Wen Yuan tried to struggle out of Lu Bu's grasp, Lu Bu pulled down forcefully and Wen Yuan fell back to her seat:

"Un, we understand the gist of things now." Hua Tuo respectfully bowed as she said so when she heard this and signalled to me with her eyes that we could leave.

"... Un."

Even though Yi De was right in front of us, there was probably nothing we could do now.

"Well then, we'll be taking our leave, Lord Zhang Fei."

"Un, alright." Yi De said as she got up to send us off, "Though our small county does not have an abundance of resources, we will still comply with any reasonable requests you may have since it's the Imperial Chancellor's orders after all."

"... Un."

The Imperial Chancellor huh... I muttered, and turned to leave but I suddenly felt like I had something I had to say.

And so, I turned back, "Lord Zhang Fei, would you be willing to come with us when we leave Gucheng?"

"Un? Hahaha, what's that?" Yi De laughed as she spread her arms open with a helpless look on her face, "I'm the magistrate of Gucheng, how could I abandon my duties just like that?"

I didn't really feel sad at Yi De's answer, and actually managed to squeeze out a thin smile as I said, "... You're right, I guess."

Wasn't it obvious that would be her answer?

"Hei!" When we returned to the inn, Wen Yuan finally couldn't take it anymore and vented her rage on a chair.

"Wen Yuan." Lu Bu said with a frown. But rather than anger, it felt like she was disheartened. Lu Bu didn't speak much just now but she probably feels the same way as the rest of us.

"Where are the rest?"

"Lord Zhou Cang and Lord Guan Ping are with the troops while Lord Liao Hua is attending to logistical matters."

I see, so they're all busy with military affairs.

As for Chen Gong, I'd sent her to buy food. She was visibly very unwilling to do so but she eventually relented to both hard and soft coercion methods.

"How is it now? Is it still just as bad?" Gan Qing asked as she and Mi Zhen brought tea for us, though she can probably guess the outcome from our gloomy expressions.

"Yes, it's worse than I thought." Hua Tuo said as she squinted to find her tea cup. She only managed to find it after guessing twice, and took a draught before she continued, "A whole years' worth of memories are gone. It will be difficult to convince her with words, and even more difficult to regain her memories."

"Does Lord Hua Tuo not have any treatment methods?"

"Physical wounds and a lack of energy or even life force can be dealt with but I can't solve things related to the soul." Hua Tuo wanted to take another sip of tea but when the cup met her mouth, she pouted and set the cup down, "And it looks like the effect of memory loss is extremely great. Even if I do find a treatment method, we will need to bring her with us."

"Impossible, she said it herself that she won't leave this place." Wen Yuan said as she shook her head. I did not know what reason could move her either. From her perspective, we're just some strangers after all.

Dang *Dang* *Dang*... *Dang* *Dang* *Dang*...

Just then, a few light knocks could be heard on the door. Judging by the volume, it's definitely not Zhou Cang or Guan Ping.

Could it be Liao Hua?

“Who is it?”

Wen Yuan’s temper hasn’t subsided yet so I stopped her just as she was about to stand, and went to open the door.

As the door opened, a person wearing a wide straw hat could be seen standing at the entrance.

“Umm, who are you looking for?”

“... May I ask if Guan Yu Guan Yun Chang is here?”

“Un, I’m Guan Yu. You are?”

At this, the person lightly raised her head and took off her straw hat— Revealing an expressionless face before me. This face was one that wouldn’t waver even if she was about to be executed.

Unbelievable.

“Sun Qian?!”

“What? Who?!”

“Lord Sun Qian?”

Everyone else in the room gathered at the entrance when they heard my surprised cry.

“... It is indeed I, Gong You. It’s been a while, everyone.” She looked at me with her clear, bright eyes and used her hand to wipe the dust off my face and gave a very faint smile, “I’m here under orders of our lord to find everyone.”

“Sun Qian!”

At this moment, that expressionless face was more endearing than anything else, and I was overwhelmed by many emotions as I tightly embraced her.

“... Lord Guan Yu, I can’t breathe.”

“Ah, sorry.” I hurriedly released her as Sun Qian always had the same expression no matter what state she was in.

“But we finally linked up huh. Umm, how is our lord?”

“Un, our lord is waiting for everyone at Runan.”

“Xuan De...”

“We finally found big brother Xuan De!”

"Ah– Yes!"

Everyone seemed to be relieved when they heard this and smiled from the bottom of their hearts. Lu Bu, of all people, had the biggest reaction as she actually sank to the ground.

"... Please don't exaggerate it, everyone. It's only been a few months."

"That's easy for you to say, seeing as you've been with our lord."

"... It was rather tiring."

Though she said as much, I could detect a sense of superiority from Sun Qian's tone.

"But how did you know we were here?"

"I ran into Lord Xiahou Dun on the way."

Ah so that's how. But looks like we can see big brother soon.

"Let's not tarry any further and set off immediately."

"Big brother Xuan De is probably looking forward to seeing us too!"

"But, what do we do about Yi De?" Hua Tuo asked with a look of concern. This was the one question that was a thorn in everyone's heart.

Instantly, everyone's mood froze over.

"... May I ask what happened with Lord Zhang Fei?"

"..." Everyone wordlessly lowered their heads. Sun Qian looked at me, hoping to get an answer from me.

After wrangling inside for a long while, all I could answer was, "It's a long story."

Chapter 16: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Xuan De at last

TL: MC becomes an MC.

Liu Bei POV

Hai~ I sighed out of boredom, frustration and worry as I sat in the main hall of Runan commandery and looked out of the window.

This hall was already big to begin with, but now that Gong You was gone, it became even more desolate. Runan was also previously 1 of the main battlefields so a lot of the paint on the walls had peeled off and the air was filled with the depressing smell of dust.

It's already been a few days since Gong You has left, why hasn't she sent a message back yet?

... Don't worry, my lord.

She said this very resolutely so I didn't ask where she was planning to go or what leads she was going to follow. Now that I think about it, this situation is no different from having her go MIA.

"Ahem..."

"Wu..." I hurriedly sat up when I heard someone fake a cough and didn't dare to show any more sign that I was slacking off.

Sitting at my side was Zhao Yun Zhao Zi Long, whom I happened to meet when I was escaping Xu state. She had come under the last order of Gongsun Zan to join me, and has been with me for a few months now.

Of course, even someone like me who isn't very knowledgeable about history or the Three Kingdoms knows the name of Zhao Yun.

And this Zhao Yun was currently shaking her head with a displeased expression as she looked at the me who was sighing, "It's only been this long and you're like this already, Xuan De."

"But..."

That may be true but the wait just before is always the worst, just like the last day before the fermenting process is complete and wine is ready.

If we follow what happens in history, then the 3 of us should be able to reunite soon enough. I can feel it, that it will happen very soon.

Just then, Zi Long leaned over and waved her palm in front of my face. “Xuan De, instead of just waiting about, why don’t you learn something? It can be anything, governance or martial arts etc.”

“Un... I’m not bragging but my skill in martial arts is...”

“Come spar with me.” Zi Long said as she pulled out her shiny silver spear from god knows where.

“I’m sorry, I was too arrogant,” I hurriedly apologised as I bowed deeply.

Why do you have to demand so much from me? Isn’t it enough that I can protect myself? If Gong You is here, she will definitely speak up for me.

(TL: As a reminder, he actually drove away Li Dian in V4.)

“Xuan De, are you thinking that if Lord Sun Qian is here, she will definitely be on your side?”

Wu...

“It’s way too easy to guess what Xuan De is thinking about. It’s almost as if it’s written on your face.” Zi Long chuckled as she said so, “It is precisely because the one who spoils you isn’t around that I can train you well.”

“Please show mercy...”

“Lord Administrator, Lord Associate General, we have brought today’s portion here.” Just as I finished pleading with Zi Long, 2 men with crew cuts came walking in. They both had a stack of bamboo scrolls, and it seemed like they had a lot with them.

And when they reached where we were, they dumped all of the bamboo scrolls on my table. All together, they made a small mountain and it looked like there were about 200 or so scrolls. How can a mere commandery have so many issues?

“It’s been hard on you both, Liu Pi, Gong Du.”

“We’ve not really have had to do anything particularly hard.” “That’s right, the one who has it hard is the Lord Administrator.”

That’s right!

“What nonsense are you 2 spouting? Isn’t settling these the duty of the Lord Administrator? Right, Imperial Uncle Liu Bei?”

“... Yes...”

What else can I possibly say when I’m faced with Zi Long’s stern smile?

“Un, good answer.” Zi Long nodded and reached out to grab a scroll, “Well then, let’s begin

tackling today's portion."

"Hai~" I really am not used to it when Gong You isn't around and there's nobody to help me deal with administrative work.

But even as I complained in my heart, I still had no choice but to raise my brush and look at the Han Dynasty script on the scrolls. I've basically been winging it these few days.

I'll just take it as a form of training. I'm Liu Bei after all.

Hai~ I sighed once more.

Yi De, Yun Chang, Wen Yuan Feng Xian and everyone else. Have they reached our doorstep already?

Haha, I'm really good at dreaming.

"Big brother..."

Un? All of a sudden, a voice that couldn't be more familiar cam from the entrance. No matter how much this voice changes, I will always be able to recognise it by instinct.

I slowly raised my head, and before I could even get a glimpse of who it was, I replied, "Yun Chang?"

The one who appeared before me was the dark red haired young girl who was wearing the green robes that I'd bought for her. Before I could recover from my surprise, she'd ran up to me with tears streaming down her face.

And when she came up to me, she hugged me tightly.

"Big brother... Big brother... I don't want to part with you ever again..." She repeated these words over and over as she held me in her arms.

"Un, we won't. We won't." I, who was buried in her breasts, repeated these words in reply.

Ah, that's right, this is Yun Chang's warmth. This is Yun Chang's scent. It's been a few months since we've last met but I still can't forget how my second sister is like.

"Xuan De!!"

"My lord!"

Immediately, another 2 figures ran in from the entrance as they called out to me dearly.

"Feng Xian! Wen Yuan!"

Wang!

Yes, our little Red Hare as well.

I called out their names as they lay on top of me.

“Big brother Xuan De!!”

And next were Gan Qing and Mi Zhen who flew at me, and this made me lose my balance and fall onto the ground. But even as I fell, everyone didn’t let go.

We’ve finally reunited, and we’re together once more.

“Big brother... Do you know how much has happened on our journey... And how much we’re worried about you!”

“Un... I know... I know... It really has been hard on you all...” I was overwhelmed by my emotions and tears streamed down my face without stopping.

Even though I knew we would reunite, even though I knew they would definitely be alright, I was still very thankful and relieved. At this time, I really cannot think as a person from the future.

And the reason is because I’m Liu Bei.

How could I not be moved to tears from sheer happiness after reuniting with my little sister and companions?

There’s no way that’s not happening.

“Looks like today’s portion won’t be finished huh~” Zi Long said as she smiled at us.

Isn’t this great? Zi Long mouthed to me.

Un, yes. I too mouthed back my reply.

“Looks like I’ll be able to meet Yi De again soon.”

Now all my worries were laid to rest and Yun Chang would probably bring me to Yi De soon. Should I start thinking about the promise I made with my little sisters back in Xu state?

There should be some similarities between the historical relations of brothers and ours which will become spouses right.

“... Big brother, about that...”

But when they heard what I said, everyone’s smiles faded away.

I don’t know what happened but I get the feeling that it’s nothing good

Looks like my premonition has come true once more, albeit in a way I never imagined.

“What?”

Even after I heard it from several people, I still couldn’t believe it.

Yi De has lost her memories?

“Impossible!” I exclaimed as I slammed the table, the very first time I have done so since I’ve come here, in a fit of rage and bewilderment.

“I too feel the same but now... It’s the truth after all.” Yun Chang said between her clenched teeth as she lowered her head.

But what she doesn’t know is that my impossible is an absolute impossible and not an utterance borne out of mere frustration and disbelief.

I’m not good at history at all but I’ve never heard anything about Zhang Fei losing his memories, All I know is that the 3 brothers reunite after Guan Yu crosses 5 passes and slays 6 generals.

But now, Yi De has lost her memories. What the heck is going on?

“Yun Chang, is what you said really true?”

“I wouldn’t joke around with our oath...”

“Could you have made a mistake somewhere?”

“Big brother! Please don’t make me repeat this over and over!” Yun Chang roared at me, but her voice wasn’t one of rage, but one of sorrow, and after she did so, she began to sniffle.

“... I’m sorry, Yun Chang.”

I said too much.

“My lord, it is indeed as Yun Chang has said. We all saw it with our own eyes.”

“Un, I got it.” I sighed and slowly sat back down on my seat.

But what the heck is this? I’m clearly Liu Bei, and I’m in the last years of the Eastern Han so why was there something that shouldn’t have happened?

...

Wait... This isn’t the only thing that shouldn’t be happening. Just raising my head, I would see Feng Xian, Wen Yuan and Hua Tuo; 3 people who shouldn’t be here.

Now that I think about it, I've been unknowingly changing history since the very beginning. Zhang Jue, Lu Bu, Cao Cao's father, Yuan Shu, Yan Liang, even that expansive Battle of Guandu. Weren't all of my actions then outside of what happened in history?

... Perhaps... What happened to Yi De, is my fault? Could this be the butterfly effect of my actions?

“...”

“Big brother? What’s wrong?”

“My lord?”

“Xuan De, don’t fall asleep with your eyes open.”

“He’s clearly not sleeping alright? He’s not Lord Lu Bu.”

“...” All I saw was white nothingness in front of me. I didn’t know what I should say, or what I should do.

So the ultimate culprit is me?

“... Snap out of it, my lord.”

It was me who brought harm to Yi De.

“Xuan De.”

If I hadn’t been such a busybody, this wouldn’t have happened.

“Xuan De!”

“Ah!” All of a sudden, I felt a force being exerted on my body, and I toppled over.

“Big brother!”

The pain from the fall made me regain my senses and I turned to see Zi Long’s stern, beautiful face.

“Don’t help him, Yun Chang. I was just trying to wake him up.” Zi Long gestured to Yun Chang not to move and looked at me with cold eyes as she continued, “Xuan De, get a hold of yourself. Look at you, what are we supposed to do with you in that state?”

Zi Long’s voice was unexpectedly kind unlike how her expression was.

“In any case, Xuan De must now think about what we need to do now.” Zi Long said as she swept her hands across the room, “Everyone is waiting for a decision by their lord.”

“...” I followed her palm and swept my eyes across everyone’s faces. Powerlessness and

helplessness were written all over their faces. These feelings were things that only I had shown before.

Ah, that's right, I'm Liu Bei. If even I am so weak to the point where I have broken down in front of everyone, it's over.

History has already changed... What I need to do now is to deal with what lies ahead of me, I convinced myself as I forced myself to get up from the floor.

It's times like these that make me feel that having close relations are painful.

"Big brother, don't be like this." Yun Chang said as she brought me into her arms once more, "What happened to Yi De is not big brother's fault."

... Who knows? But whether it is or isn't, what I need to do now is to think about what to do next.

And right now, I must take a stand. At this sudden development, I must face it head-on.

"Everyone, come with me to see Yi De."

Even if she has lost her memories, I must still reunite with Yi De.

Chapter 17: Intermission (1)

TL: Some perspective shifts between narrator and story characters.

Liu Bei Liu Xuan De is about to leave Runan and make a beeline for Gucheng in search of his amnesia-struck third sister. But let's leave aside what happens along the way to Gucheng from Runan and turn our eyes south, to Jing state where relentless efforts by a certain ambassador are about to finally reap some benefits.

Tatatata... Outside the guest hall, a girl wearing a set of floral patterned robes was tapping at an abacus in her hands with smooth and experienced moves. Her expression was calm, and also sharp. Her elegant eyes made one feel that she was very astute but she wasn't someone anyone could order about. And at this time, she was fervently fighting for her lord.

"Hai... Money..." She was currently worried about her expenses. It's been over a month since she'd come here and the funds she had with her were almost depleted, yet she had yet to speak with the Governor of Jing state, Liu Biao. Progress was very slow, and if Liu Bei were to advance south to Jing state under the prevailing circumstances, there was no guarantee that he would be welcome to stay.

There were many good friends of hers in Jing state from when she was still a merchant but she couldn't find it in her to borrow money from them.

It's been a month, and she doesn't know how her lord is doing. She's worried about the safety of her lord, but more so about his wallet and whether he has been spending prudently.

"Lord Mi Zhu, our lord invites you in."

Just then, a girl who wore a gown with a short skirt and long sleeves, and had her hair tied up in a ponytail, came walking in with steady footsteps and reported to Mi Zhu. The woman had an aura about her that made one think she was an upright person and had resolute eyes below her bangs. Below those eyes, her lips were shut tight after she spoke and her hands were rigidly fixed to her waist.

When Mi Zhu heard this, she hurriedly shook her sleeves, tidied her clothing and cleared her throat.

"Un, thanks Lord Yi Ji." She said as she smiled and nodded.

"I'm curious as to how you wish to convince my lord." As she finished, the girl named Yi Ji swung her ponytail back and felt her neck before she strode forward.

I must make this quick, Mi Zhu thought as she kept the small abacus in her pocket.

After they entered the guest hall, Yi Ji left.

And right before Mi Zhu was a tall, handsome man who was looking at her with his hands behind his back. His eyebrows were sharp and he had a beard at his chin. He wasn't even 30 but he seemed much older than that.

At his sides were 2 girls. The one on the left had a much larger left sleeve while the one on the right had a much larger right sleeve. One had a kind expression while the other had a stern one on. Both looked at Mi Zhu with disdain.

"Lord Liu Biao." Mi Zhu was unperturbed by this and stopped at a suitable distance before Liu Biao before she saluted and bowed deeply, "I am here to represent my lord in an audience with Lord Liu Biao."

"Please don't say that, you have been here for more than a month now. I haven't been able to see you as I have been far too busy with work." Liu Biao lightly bowed as he said so.

Busy with work? You probably know what I'm here for.

Mi Zhu knew, of course, that this was just diplomatic language and since has actually said it to her like that, that means that Liu Biao has no intention of letting her lord come to Jing state.

Or perhaps...

As Mi Zhu looked about, the gaze of the 2 people became sharper still.

Or perhaps these 2 have been influencing Liu Biao's decisions?

"Lord Liu Biao. I've come before you today for my lord..."

"Your lord's matters have no relation with us right?" The one with the stern expression interrupted Mi Zhu before she could finish.

"But—"

"Lord Mi Zhu, you need not say any further. We all know why you're here." The one with the kind face said as she explained with a smile, "It may be difficult to hear this but our situation isn't the most optimistic either. If we should incur the wrath of Cao Cao by sheltering Liu Bei, then the ones who will suffer are the Jing state citizens."

Are they so adamant? If so, then things might be difficult for Mi Zhu, though she should have foreseen something like this coming.

A precarious situation, a very precarious situation.

To Mi Zhu, she has only 1 card that can turn her situation around.

And so, Mi Zhu pushed her hair back and boldly took a step forward, before she raised her

voice and said—

“Lord Liu Biao, do you intend to do nothing and just watch as someone who shares the same bloodline of Liu Sheng, Prince of Zhongshan?!”

“...” Liu Biao’s expression wavered slightly.

“My lord.”

“My lord, don’t forget the big picture.”

The 2 people at his side hurriedly reminded their lord not to be rash.

“I know.” Liu Biao closed his eyes and nodded slightly at his 2 strategists. But after a moment of silence, he still said the words which Mi Zhu was waiting for, “... Lord Liu Bei... Is he alright now?”

Good, Mi Zhu cheered inside her mind and prepared for the follow through.

“My lord is currently being suppressed by Cao Cao, and has no choice but to head south. However, my lord isn’t well-acquainted with most feudal lords and I’m afraid we will be unable to get assistance. The only one we can depend on is Lord Lou Biao who shares the same ancestry as my lord.”

“...”

“My lord! What will Jing state do if Cao Cao comes south to invade Jing state?” The stern girl on the right exclaimed when she saw that her lord was moved.

It seems like they had arranged it before to have Liu Biao speak as little as possible and not to promise anything but nobles like him want to do something the more you try to restrict them.

And it is this sort of thinking that Mi Zhu badly needed.

If she had listened to the girl with the kind face and not continued, she would have utterly failed in this endeavor.

It’s always good to hang on for a while more, Mi Zhu thought as she began to relax from relief.

Mi Zhu then saluted and calmly continued, “At present, there are many nobles around the Son of Heaven who seek to control him, and Cao Cao is not a loyal retainer of the Han whom you can trust. If so, why not form a faction with my lord?”

She paused and raised her head slightly to look at Liu Biao’s reaction, and only continued when she saw that he was now frowning, “Lastly, permit me to ask this: Is the world now that of the Liu clan, or that of the Cao clan? Lord Liu Biao, wouldn’t you want to restore the Han with my lord?!”

Liu Biao has been convinced, he is completely convinced.

I've won, Mi Zhu thought.

— I hope that Lord Liu Biao carefully considers what I have said.

After leaving this line, Mi Zhu exited the guest hall in greater spirits than before.

Now what she had to do was to tackle the financial issues in her side.

After Mi Zhu left, the 2 girls by his side rushed to Liu Biao.

“My lord, didn’t I tell you not to speak too much? What Mi Zhu said was just to bait you. Don’t listen to her, my lord.”

“Now that the Battle of Guandu has concluded and the Yuan-Cao alliance have occupied the north, what we should do now is to avoid incurring the wrath of Cao Cao and take Jiangdong or Yi state as soon as possible so that we can stand against the north on equal terms. Only then can my lord accomplish his ambition of the restoration of the Han.”

“...” Liu Biao didn’t reply, nor did he look at their anxious faces, and only sank into thought.

After a long while, he finally spoke up, “The world now is a world belonging to the Liu clan. Based on seniority, Liu Bei can be considered my younger cousin...”

“My lord, could it be that you...”

“My lord must not advance down that path, please do reconsider...”

The 2 girls had more to say, but Liu Biao stopped them as he extended his palm.

“Kuai Liang, Kuai Yue, what you both have said makes sense but please forgive me for being unable to comply with them.” Liu Biao said as he looked ahead with a fire in his eyes, “I am resolute on my decision on this.”

“My lord...” The stern girl wanted to say more but the other girl grabbed her shoulder and stopped her.

“Yue, that’s enough already.” The other girl smiled as she nodded, “Since our lord has said as much, we just need to listen.”

“... Yes.”

They weren’t satisfied with this outcome, but saying more wouldn’t help so Kuai Liang and Kuai Yue both decided not to say any further. He was their lord after all. No matter how much they wanted something, they couldn’t go against their lord’s wishes.

“Un, thank you both.” Liu Biao gave them a heartfelt thanks as he lightly hugged the 2

people who understood him.

Inside, he felt guilty but to him, matters of the family take precedence above everything else.

Chapter 18: Intermission (2)

With just one move, Mi Zhu was able to score a diplomatic victory and secure a place in Jing state for her lord, who is currently rushing to Gucheng. Meanwhile in Jiangdong, the job of ruling has been left to Sun Quan, the new feudal lord who has also similarly met with many problems.

*Dadadadada *...

A petite girl wearing a long floral gown with a plain veil wrapped around her was currently brisk walking into the feudal lord's residence. What filled her mind was her new lord– Sun Quan's immaturity and the ridiculous acts she has committed that could only be done by a kid.

“Has our lord escaped again?”

“Un, it seems like today's documents are more than usual.”

Following behind Zhou Yu were 2 of her sub-commanders. The girl wearing a linen jacket with a hood named Xu Sheng while the girl with tanned skin who was wearing plate armour was called Ding Feng. Both of them were recently promoted to their positions and carried out Zhou Yu's orders as her Associate Generals.

“Why is our lord so... Hai, it's just some documents. Surely she could finish them in a jiffy?” Ding Feng expressed her dismay at her lord's actions with raised eyebrows. She wanted to admonish her lord further but she was a subordinate after all, so she refrained from doing so.

“Our lord has her own considerations. She was forced to assume the role after all so this can't be helped.” Xu Sheng seemed to be more understanding as she said so while fiddling with her chainmail under her clothing. She liked to wear her chainmail underneath her clothing as she had trypophobia, which was an open secret amongst everyone, and she detested things like chainmail or honeycombs.

“Xu Sheng shouldn't take our lord's side too much and have your own thinking sometimes.”

“How the lord thinks is how I think.”

“Un... Fine.”

No view of your own huh. Zhou Yu gave up for now. She felt that the day that Xu Sheng could face things on her own was the day she could ascend to be a commander in her own right.

But really, our lord has run away again?

Compared to how she looked, Zhou Yu was actually rather mature. She'd worked with Sun Ce for a while too and wasn't very used to her new lord who was more foolish.

"Oi- Gong Jin—" While on a small path between buildings, someone ran over and stopped Zhou Yu with a voice that was loud and clear but had a tinge of indolence to it.

When Zhou Yu turned back, she saw that it was Lu Su.

Lu Su had his slightly curly hair tied and the belt for his long robes were loose to the point that his clothing kept slipping off his shoulders as he jogged over.

"Lu Su, what is with your attire! How disgraceful!"

"Ah, I immediately rushed over when I heard that our lord ran away- Ah!" Lu Su explained as he ruffled his messy hair but Zhou Yu grabbed him over and began to tidy up his clothing, "I'll do it myself!"

"No way. It's still a mess whenever I leave it to you to do it yourself."

She's smaller than me but I have no say when she's around at all, Lu Su complained in his mind though he didn't actually hate the situation he was in.

"Un? What're you smiling about?"

"No, nothing." Lu Su hurriedly retracted his instinctive smile and then pointed at Zhou Yu's head. "Your hair over here is standing, probably because of your sleeping position."

"Ah!" Zhou Yu blushed immediately after Lu Su said so, and she immediately used her hands to flatten her hair after she felt her hair and confirmed that it was true.

She then turned to scold the other 2 people, "Xu Sheng, Ding Feng, couldn't you have told me!"

"Eh? Wasn't this hairstyle on purpose?" Ding Feng feigned ignorance with a serious look.

"How could that be?"

"I thought that you would discover it yourself sooner or later."

"I hope that you can tell it to me straight in future."

"Yes." Xu Sheng lowered her head, at which Zhou Yu couldn't help but feel that Xu Sheng had no ill will at all.

No wonder she'd been feeling gazes on her all day. It was her bed hair.

"Looks like Gong Jin doesn't have good sleeping posture."

"Cut the crap, let's go!"

"Ah~ Ah~ I know, don't pull me."

When they reached the main hall, all they saw was Zhang Zhao sitting at the second seat with stacks of documents on the table in front of her. Clearly, she was dealing with the work that Sun Quan hadn't finished.

"Zi Bu, what's the status?"

"Zhou Tai and Jiang Qin have gone out to look for her but there is no news yet."

"When did she go missing?"

"About an hour ago. Our lord slipped away when Zhou Tai went to get tea for her."

"And Jiang Qin? Where was Jiang Qin then?"

"... That pirate was swimming in the sea then."

"What a useless fellow."

"Hahaha, what a slacker that Jiang Qin is."

"Shut it, Lu Su. Ding Feng, Xu Sheng, go and help them find our lord as well. Start with the southern flower gardens. Our lord may have gone there to make some strange clothes again."

"Yes." "I hear and obey."

"Hu~" Zhou Yu sighed after the 2 of them left and sat beside Zhang Zhao as she began to help her out with the documents.

"Let me help out as well. The work in Jiangdong has increased substantially recently after we took Jianye and Wu Du."

"Thanks, you 2." Zhang Zhao bowed slightly as she stuck her hands in her sleeves and brought them to her chest.

Though she was short, she wore very long robes. Her face was one of young girl, and she even looked a couple of years younger than Zhou Yu. But the truth is that Zhang Zhao was already past 30 years of age.

How this was possible was a famous mystery in Jiangdong.

"When she gets back, I'll have to give her a good lecture." Zhou Yu mumbled as she got to work with the bamboo scrolls.

"No, I'll do it first."

"Eh?" "L, lord Zhang Zhao?"

Zhang Zhao spoke in a calm voice but it gave Lu Su and Zhou Yu a fright.

Zhang Zhao only lectures people when she is truly angry and when it comes to lecturing, Zhang Zhao actually delivers a lecture that starts with the classics all the way to contemporary studies and literature. By the time she finishes, more than half a day will have passed.

The only reason why she hasn't shown her anger on the surface is because she is concentrating on the unfinished administrative work at hand, Zhou Yu guessed.

And that was the actual truth as Zhang Zhao was burning with rage inside like never before even though she had a calm expression on her.

"Oh, all 3 of you are here."

Un?

Just then, a firm, female voice came from the entrance.

When the 3 of them heard it, they hurriedly raised their heads.

What they saw was a girl with a long fringe that obscured her eyes standing at the door with a faint smile. All she wore were a set of short robes that exposed her smooth arms and her bandaged chest.

"My lord! Why have you come here?" Zhou Yu was rather surprised as Sun Ce had stayed in a separate annex while she was still recovering from the assassination attempt and hadn't asked about how things were for some time now.

"My lord!" Zhang Zhao called out as she bowed.

"Yo—" Lu Su raised his hand as he called out stiffly and casually.

"Give a proper greeting!"

"Ow."

And he got his head hit by Zhou Yu.

"Yo—" Sun Ce however, was unperturbed as she greeted everyone like how Lu Su did, "What's up with Zhong Mou today?"

"Our little lord has run off somewhere again." Zhou Yu said helplessly, and harboured hopes that Sun Ce would take some time to discipline Sun Quan.

"Hahaha, is that so?" But Sun Ce actually started laughing instead, "She really is like my younger self."

"My lord!"

"Alright alright, I got it. I'll speak with Zhong Mou on the way back." Sun Ce paused and looked about before she continued, "I actually came out here to tell everyone that Xuan De might come over and stay for a few days."

"Eh? What's that?"

"Un, Xuan De's subordinate Jian Yong came to look for me a little while ago about this and I agreed first as I felt it was a good idea. I'll speak to Zhong Mou about it on my way back as well... Ah, I'll be leaving first."

Sun Ce looked about and seemed to have seen something that made her leave in a hurry before she could finish what she had to say.

"Oi!! My lord, we cannot allow that!" By the time Zhang Zhao recovered from her surprise and tried to protest her lord's decision, Sun Ce was gone.

"..."

Wu.

Zhou Yu could feel Zhang Zhao's rage continue to rise and didn't know what she should say.

But for Liu Bei to come to Jiangdong, that is something that would draw a lot of attention. Zhang Zhao probably has this opinion as well. But their lord probably won't relent on this, Zhou Yu thought.

"Oi! You guys!" All of a sudden, someone else came running in.

"Lu Meng? Why're you here as well?"

"Our lord slipped out of her ward all of a sudden?! And her wound hasn't even fully healed yet... May I ask if you guys have seen her?"

...

They really are sisters huh.

It wasn't just Zhou Yu, Lu Su and Zhang Zhao had this thought as well.

Chapter 19: Don't tell me this is a reunion at Gucheng

Liu Bei POV

Gucheng was now right before my eyes. As its name implies, the city walls seemed really ancient, as thought they were built when the Eastern Han began.

(TL: Gucheng – 古城 – Literally ancient city.)

We were supposed to have a happy reunion here, I thought, as we made our way to the city gates.

“Big brother, your riding ability has improved.” Yun Chang, who was riding beside me, said to me with an impressed look.

“Ah, yeah. I’ve been involved in a lot of things in this period so I’ve had to ride a lot.”

“Actually, he rode behind me most of those times.”

“Oi... You didn’t need to say that.”

“No way, you have a lot more room for improvement and you need to improve fast.” Zi Long, who rode on my other side, shot me down. When I looked at her with a stiff smile, she laughed.

“What Lord Zhao Yun says is right.” Yun Chang nodded, and then she smiled to me, “But big brother has indeed been working hard.”

Un un, that’s right. I have been working hard, and at all things too no matter if it’s riding, governance or martial arts.

“Here it comes again. You all are pampering Xuan De too much. How will he attain a high standard if you keep this up?”

The reason why I can’t attain a high standard is because your standards are too high.

I turned to look at Yun Chang and saw her looking at me with a relieved smile. Looks like she probably started a conversation to help me relieve some tension.

“Big brother, do you still remember our promise in Xu state?”

Eh? Why are you talking about that all of a sudden?

“... Un. That matter right?”

What we’d promised then in Xu state. That we’d get married when we reunited.

The 3 of us, together.

"About that," Yun Chang nodded with a serious expression, "I would like to put it aside for now."

"Put it aside huh?"

I actually thought about the same thing as well. At this moment, Yi De is suffering from amnesia, and though I could marry Yun Chang first, this wouldn't be fair to Yi De. Even if she has lost her memories.

"Un, I got it." I expressed my approval at her proposal and placed my hand on Yun Chang's shoulder, "We'll talk about this again when Yi De's memories are back."

"... Un." Yun Chang nodded again, and grabbed the hand I placed on her shoulder as she tilted her head and felt the warmth of my hand with her cheek, "I'm really grateful that big brother didn't lose his memories."

"Are you— Imperial Uncle Liu Bei?" Yi De asked firmly with a polite smile that you would make when you're meeting someone for the first time when I met with her 1-on-1.

As she asked, she bowed deeply. This made me feel very off as this sort of thing was what Yi De was bad at doing the most.

"Ah..." I ended up feeling nervous and my mind went blank for a moment before I followed suit and bowed.

When I bowed, I couldn't resist looking up at the amnesia-struck Yi De. It was clear as day that Yi De has lost her memories. Her actions, speech and even her countenance were all completely different from that of the Zhang Yi De I knew.

Of course, I didn't come into this meeting with any sort of wishful thinking so it was easier for me to accept the reality before me.

— Big brother, Hua Tuo expressly instructed us not to agitate Yi De.

Before I came to this meeting, the words which Yun Chang told me reverberated in my ears. I understand why of course, and now that I've seen how Yi De is like now, it's clear that trying anything funny will be a dangerous move.

"Come, please sit here, Imperial Uncle."

"Ah, no need for that. You're the Administrator of this place so it's more appropriate for you to sit at the head." I refused the offer and sat on the second seat.

"In that case, I won't say any further then." Yi De smiled and bowed once more before sitting on the second seat opposite me.

She gave me the main seat probably because of my status as a royal relative. I tried not to

read too much into it and considered the most likely reason behind her actions.

"The instructions I received then were to let Lord Guan Yu and Imperial Uncle reunite, and now you have indeed reunited. This truly is a cause for celebration."

"Un, yeah I guess."

Cause for celebration? Definitely not. What made it worse was that these words came from Yi De. However, I felt neither rage nor sorrow when I heard her say this. All I felt was that fate really has a way of toying with people, and smiled bitterly.

"Well then, where does Imperial Uncle plan to head to next?"

"Probably to Jing state, to seek refuge with its Governor, Liu Biao."

Though Mi Zhu hasn't returned yet, this is probably how things will advance next. No other place can easily take us in anyway.

"I see. Well then, you can continue to put up here before you decide to set off."

"Un... Thanks Administrator..." I thanked Yi De. Even now, I still felt that this Yi De was really off-putting.

But before that—

"What plans does the Administrator have?" I asked.

"Me? Well I'm definitely going to continue staying here. The end of the year is near and I have to prepare my accounts and the festivities for the new year, as well as report on the status of Gucheng in Xuchang."

So it's like that huh? I'd seen this coming already as she was an Administrator after all so there couldn't be any other answer.

But whether it was me, Yun Chang, Lu Bu, Gan Qing, or anyone else, our number one priority was to have Yi De come along with us.

Since her memories are lost, what we need to do is to spend as much time with her as we possibly can and hope that she is able to regain her memories somehow.

And that is why I am meeting Yi De now.

I'm not confident of success but everyone felt that I was the only one who could convince Yi De.

"... Won't the Administrator come along with us?"

"Go with you? Why would I? I'm a Court official of the Great Han."

What Court official are you huh? I denied her words inside my mind. Yi De was no longer that Yi De but I still felt somehow that there were things inside her that belonged to Yi De.

“Doesn’t the Administrator want to try and do something outside?”

“Un?” Yi De took a sip of tea elegantly, “Why would I?”

“In such troubled times, everyone wants to leave their name in the annals of history. I doubt the Administrator wishes to live a peaceful life in this county city—”

“No, I do indeed want to live a peaceful life here.”

“Eh?” Yi De’s words shocked me greatly. When she saw my expression, she began to giggle uncontrollably.

“You don’t need to be this shocked, no? There are a lot of people like me actually.” Yi De smiled as she took another sip of tea, “In any case, unless the Imperial Court transfers me, I won’t be leaving this place.”

“... I see.”

Impossible. I can’t get her to leave. That Yi De no longer exists.

That lively innocence is gone, that indomitable fighting spirit is gone as well. In front of me was an outstanding Court official who sought to live peacefully in a small county city.

“Well then... Ah—!”

I’ll be leaving then.

I stood up and planned to say these words but because I’d sat for too long, my soles and waist were numb and I cried out as I fell to the ground.

Because of loud cry, Yi De got shocked terribly and spilt tea on herself.

“Ah...” I, the culprit for this mess, lay on the ground, not knowing what to do.

I looked at Yi De and all of a sudden, her eyebrows creased and she yelled at me as she stood up, “What is with this screaming you idiot!!!!”

“Eh?” Her angry roar stunned me. It seemed like the Yi De I knew appeared for an instant just now.

“Eh?” Yi De was similarly stunned and seemed confused as to why she would say such things and hurriedly apologised to me, “Ah, ah, I’m really sorry, I don’t know what was wrong with me just now!”

— What is with this screaming you idiot!!!!

Those words left a very big impression on me then.

When I first transferred to this era, the one whom I met first was Yi De. And those were the first words I heard in this era.

Yi De was still apologising but I was ecstatic.

“Hahaha—” And couldn’t hold back my laughter. Looks like ‘Yi De’ is still there.

“Umm, is Imperial Uncle alright?” She extended her hand to me to help me up.

“Ah, I’m fine, no problem.” I said, and grabbed hold of Yi De’s hand, scaring her and making her let a delicate ‘oya’ cry.

“Administrator— No, Yi De! You must leave this place with me!”

“Eh?! But...”

If I can’t move her with simple methods, then I’ll use even simpler methods and just plead with her outright. I’ve decided after all, that I must take Yi De with me.

“Perhaps you might find these words strange, but I hope you can remember me. If it weren’t for you then, I wouldn’t have been forced onto the route of history. If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have made a speech to recruit troops nor would I have been able to meet with Yun Chang and the rest. I would have just become an ordinary person that couldn’t be more ordinary! So how could you drop out halfway during my journey? You must take responsibility!”

“U-u-u-umm! This is...”

“In conclusion—” I was almost kneeling by now as I held onto Yi De tightly with both hands, and buried my head into her hands, “I need you!”

“Eh... This...” I raised my head and looked straight into Yi De’s eyes.

Her eyes were filled with doubt and seemed to be devoid of emotion. And I hoped that I would be able to transmit the emotions in me to her.

And then she smiled bitterly, which I took as a sign of my victory.

“Though you are a weirdo, you seem very impressive.”

— Though you are a weirdo, you seem very impressive.

The scene before seemed to overlap with the one in Zhuo county then. I was filled with doubt then, but now it was excitement that filled me.

Yi De’s memories still haven’t come back but I shall thank my blessings for now.

Yi De, welcome back.

(TL: In the original fiction, they reunited in Gucheng where Zhang Fei was there first, and Guan Yu second. Zhang Fei was convinced that Guan Yu betrayed Liu Bei despite the pleas of Liu Bei's wives and duelled Guan Yu. Some commander of Cao Cao came along and Guan Yu stopped and killed him and thus, Zhang Fei believed in Guan Yu once more.)

“Zi Zhong, xiao Yong, you’re both back huh.” After I returned to the inn, I found that they had settled in nicely.

“It’s been a long time, my lord.” “Xiao Bei, I’m back~”

The 2 of them didn’t seem to have changed. Zi Zhong was focused on doing our accounts while xiao Yong was lazily lying on the table.

“How did it go?”

When they heard me, they looked at each other and then nodded slightly at me.

“Un, I got through to Lord Liu Biao. The only problem is that I had to use a lot of money to do so.” “For my side, I got held up along the way, but Lord Sun Ce gave her word very quickly~”

“... That’s how it is.”

Gong You didn’t forget to wrap up for the other 2. Looks like the Xu state 3 have reunited as well.

“How was it, big brother? Did Yi De agree to coming along?” Yun Chang rushed down and asked about Yi De first.

“Un, she finally agreed.” I nodded at Yun Chang, “She said she’ll need to write a resignation letter and make some preparations and then she’ll be ready to leave.”

“Ah~ That’s great!” Yun Chang exclaimed as she collapsed into a chair nearby out of relief, This, is probably the true reunion at Gucheng.

“... Well then.” “Has our lord decided on where to go?” “There are 2 paths, Liu Biao and Sun Ce, available after all.”

The Xu state 3 got back into their usual way of speaking once more.

“Un...”

Of course it will be Liu Biao since I can’t go wrong by following the course of history.

But now that I was faced with this problem, I began to reconsider my choice. Many things

that shouldn't have happened, have happened anyway after all, with Yi De being a prime example.

Perhaps I should try and do something for Yi De.

— I've decided. We will go and visit Sun Ce in Jiangdong first before heading to Jing state.

Chapter 20: Don't tell me this is on the way to Jiangdong (1)

Liu Bei POV

It's already been a few days since we've packed up and left Gucheng. That said, the time we took to prepare was unexpectedly long.

On one hand, the resignation procedures that Yi De had to go through were extremely complicated. On the other, the massive number of troops Yun Chang needed to be re-supplied and re-organised. Some other smaller matters cropped up here and there as well and so the original date which we planned to set off got pushed back quite a bit. This was before we left, there were naturally more problems after we left.

I've always thought that leading troops for expeditions is difficult, especially since the troops we had now were all ours so I had to fulfill the role of the highest authority for various matters. As someone completely new to this, I was thrown into the deep end right away with problems that cropped up with or matters pertaining to our supplies, logistics, rest times, military regulations and discipline, and even the compensation structure and merit system. I had to be on the ball with all this as with our present army size, if they were to mutiny, we wouldn't be able to fend against them.

Coming back to the present day, it's been about a week since we've left Gucheng. Looking at the map, we're quite a distance away from the riverside port so it will still be quite a few days before we reach the port in Shouchun.

"It's getting hot..." I said as I undid the collar of my thick outer clothing, letting out a stream of hot air that floated up to the skies.

The sun today was shining down strongly while the cold, chilly winds were weak. In just the blink of an eye, it's now reached the point in the season where thick winter clothing is almost unneeded.

With the end of winter at hand, the buds of spring could already be seen all over the tree branches. By the time we reach where Sun Ce is, it should be the height of spring.

"Xuan De, please don't be so undisciplined."

"Yes..."

Zi Long's eyes were locked straight ahead but she still watched me out of the corner of her eyes and was able to notice this fine detail. I hurriedly tidied up my clothing and tolerated the torturous heat as we marched on.

"May I ask, are you Imperial Uncle Liu Bei?"

"Un?"

A girl on a horse rode up to me and began to ask me about my identity.

She had very resolute eyes, and a pretty noticeable scar down her left eye. Her hair was tied up, and was probably tucked into that thing on her head that looked like a flying saucer that even had a veil at the back. I wonder if she will feel hot when summer comes? Or does that veil have some heat emitting ability?

I was puzzled at the choice of headgear but what made me even more puzzled was what she had hanging by her waist: A whetstone and a bamboo scroll. This was clearly a very weird pair of items to have with oneself.

“Ah, I am.” Because we’d been introduced before, I still remember who she is, “You’re Liao Hua right?”

“I am indeed Liao Hua Liao Yuan Jian. My lord has a pretty good memory huh.”

“That’s... Yeah, pretty good.”

I don’t know what Liao Hua is supposed to have done but that name is pretty familiar to me. Add to that her frosty demeanor which stood out quite a bit, and it’s quite easy to remember her.

She was however, busy with military affairs before so I hadn’t had the time to speak with her at length.

Jii ...

“ ...”

Jii ...

“U, umm, does Liao Hua have anything with me?”

It’s a little too much to keep staring at me but not to say anything.

“Ah, I apologise for my rudeness.” She said with a tone that made me feel like she didn’t actually feel that she thought she was rude in the least as she rubbed the scar below her eye, “I’ve heard from General Guan that you are a peculiar individual so I wanted to have a good look at you myself.”

Peculiar individual? That Yun Chang. Why does she have to use adjectives with such weird connotations to describe me?

“I’m just an ordinary person with nothing peculiar about me as well.” I said as I shook my head to deny whatever labels Yun Chang had placed on me.

“Well then, I do have a question for my lord, what is the path you seek?”

My path?

“Un... Restoration of the Han—”

“Please don’t give me such empty, grandiose-sounding words.”

Ah... Looks like those words won’t work on everyone. But I’m really too much. By now, I can just say such words instinctively. As expected of me, Liu Bei.

But my path huh. Honestly, I haven’t actually thought too deeply about it. Yun Chang had mentioned it before, so did Feng Xian, Taishi Ci, and Sun Ce. But what is my path?

Not as ‘Liu Bei’, but as ‘me’.

“Un...”

“You’ve sunk into thought huh?” Liao Hua seemed to be disappointed at what I was doing, as though I’ve failed to live up to her expectations, “Is someone who can’t even say what his path is fit to be a feudal lord?”

“Oi, watch it.” Zi Long, who was listening by the side all this while, couldn’t listen any further and stared at Liao Hua. Even I felt scared but Liao Hua was unperturbed at all.

It wasn’t easy to answer Liao Hua’s question but I could give an answer if I had to, especially if I thought about it from a more micro perspective.

“Liao Hua, I have thought about it, and I feel that my path is to fulfill my destiny.”

“... Destiny.”

This phrase doesn’t seem like it’s used much in this era, or perhaps she was just surprised and puzzled at what I was trying to say as she frowned slightly.

At her bafflement, I nodded as I continued, “Yes, what I must do is to finish what Liu Bei has to do in these troubled times as Liu Bei.” I slowly raised a finger as I continued what I had to say that may or may not actually be answering her question, “To put it simply, I will finish all that Liu Bei has to do before Liu Bei died.”

When I finished, I wondered if I had divulged a little too much. But honestly, this was actually my path, or rather the direction I was heading in.

At this point, it doesn’t seem like I can return to my own era, so all I can do as Liu Bei is to follow the course of history and do what Liu Bei is supposed to do. I don’t know what Liu Bei’s path is but since the role I’m playing is Liu Bei, then I should at least inherit all that he had to shoulder.

Even if I’m not actually capable enough to.

That said, reality is different of course. There are already a lot of things I have changed, and Yi De now has an amnesia problem, so I’m not too sure what I should do anymore.

Moreover, I'm not actually that knowledgeable on the Three Kingdoms. After having lived through so many high-key events, I'm starting to recall more and more of what I read from the abridged versions when I was in my childhood. But all I can really recall are just the big stories like Guandu, Red Cliff etc.

Ah, now that I think about it, the 'path' I seek to walk isn't easy at all.

"I see, I understand now." Liao Hua seems to have been thinking while I was embroiled in my own thoughts all this while, and she continued to speak to me as she pressed down on her hat, "So my lord is also one who goes with the flow then?"

"No, I will seize any opportunities to control the situation when there are any."

"How does my lord know when such an opportunity arises?"

"Intuition." I just gave a vague answer to this as I couldn't actually say that I knew how things would develop long before they did.

"Then does my lord believe in fate?"

"I do."

"Then does my lord believe that he will die in the next moment?"

"No."

"What if that is your fate?"

"No, that is not my fate."

"Why is my lord so definite on this?"

"Intuition." I said, and couldn't help but to add on, "By the way, you won't die in the next instant as well."

"Eh? Why do you say so?"

"Intuition."

From what I can remember, Liao Hua seems to have lived for quite a long time. Wasn't there some saying, something about there being no great generals left in Shu or something.

(TL: The saying is [If there are no great generals left in Shu, Liao Hua will be the vanguard.] It can be interpreted as Shu having no talent by its end that even the elderly Liao Hua had to lead the army.)

"Eh..."

The more we chatted, the tighter her frown became. By now, her eyebrows were already

looking like 八.

"Umm, if I have said anything that has displeased you, please do forgive me. But what I have said has indeed come from my heart."

"... No, I just feel that what General Guan said is right."

Eh?

"A peculiar person... Right?"

"I personally believe in fate, and even if I should die in the next instant, I will wholeheartedly accept it. Of course before I die, I hope I can bear witness to these troubled times." Liao Hua nodded as she continued, "My lord is the same as me, but only on the most broadest sense. Compared to me, my lord is far more resolute in his belief in fate, as though my lord knows what will happen."

"Eh... I, is that so?"

I can't believe she got it right just like that.

"Of course, when I first met my lord, I thought that my lord was the kind of fellow who could only live on by depending on his generals."

That's actually the truth.

At her delivery of the piercing truth, all I could do was smile bitterly.

"But following the course of history huh..." She closed her eyes and stoked her scar once more. When she opened her eyes, she looked at me and said coldly, "I don't dislike such a lord. I want to see where my lord's path leads."

"Ah... Th, thanks?"

"You're welcome."

"But," She added on, "I can tell from my lord's eyes that my lord seems to have strayed from his path. I hope that my lord can resolve his doubts and troubles soon and return to his path."

"Ah..."

— Lord Liao Hua, please look at this.

"... I'll be right there."

Before I could ask her what she meant, she had disappeared like the wind. But honestly, I could largely understand what she meant.

Path... Huh? I should probably think about this a little more.

Chapter 21: Don't tell me this is on the way to Jiangdong (2)

Liu Bei POV

It was now night time and the sun had just descended past the horizon so it was time to set up camp and prepare for dinner. Though Meng De had given tacit approval for our movements, we will did our best to avoid making a ruckus as we were now extremely large in number.

One good thing about the weather these days is that nights are no longer as chilly as say a month ago, and are much more comfortable. Humans are curious creatures. They wish for summer in winter, and wish for winter in summer. As for me, I like the less extreme seasons of spring and autumn.

Not too hot, not too cold, not warm and not chilly, that's the perfect weather for me.

That said, it still doesn't feel like spring is here yet.

"So in short, I've lost my memories, and you're actually my second sister while Imperial Uncle Liu Bei is my big brother?" Yi De repeated what Yun Chang told her somewhat exasperatedly as she folded her arms.

It doesn't look like she has remembered anything yet.

Though I'm sitting not too far away from them, I didn't join the conversation. There are many reasons for this, chief of which is that I'm actually afraid of seeing Yi De's look of obliviousness like now.

"Un un, that's it. I can even recite all your favourite foods, like roasted pig trotters for example."

But Yun Chang was still at it.

"I'm really sorry but I don't actually like to eat meat." She said as she raised a finger, "I actually like to eat cabbage and white rice."

What a boring way to eat.

"Eh? That can't be right! I remember that you've always liked to eat meat? Sometimes you even carry meat with your Serpent Spear."

"... I have no idea what you're talking about." Yi De cruelly shook her head as a matter of factly, "Though I do have a serpent spear at hand, it's nothing more than a decorative weapon. I'm actually someone who's more suited to administrative work."

Eh? Suited to administrative work?

Not only was I surprised, so was Yun Chang. And it seems like Yun Chang really couldn't

accept these words at all.

“B, but...”

“Lord Guan Yu, that’s about enough.” Just then, Hua Tuo came over to stop Yun Chang as she shook her head, because she felt that saying any more at this point wouldn’t help.

“... Hai!” Yun Chang sighed audibly and got up to leave. Her back seemed extremely despondent.

As for Yi De who was sitting on the stool, she didn’t seem unperturbed either. She was frowning as she seemed to be grappling with something in her mind.

All of a sudden, she turned and looked at me. I didn’t expect this and hurriedly sat up right and reached down to fiddle with the fireplace.

“Imperial Uncle Liu, was what Lord Guan Yu said just now really the truth?”

“Eh?” I was stunned at her sudden question but I soon understood why she asked me that.

I really wanted to tell her that it was all true but I’m afraid that even if I do, it will difficult for her to accept it anyway. And if I do tell her, more seeds of doubt might sprout in her heart.

After struggling for a long while, I managed to eke out a smile as I said, “We’ll talk about this another time.”

We’ve already gotten Yi De to come with us. There’s no rush.

Hai... I was currently walking around in our encampment before dinner as I slowly gave a long exhalation.

Even though I’d said as much about Yi De earlier, and I did indeed feel that way, I was still deeply troubled by the present situation.

Before I started my walk, I made sure to change into extremely plain clothing. It wasn’t being overly self-conscious, I really was rather recognisable with my usual clothing. It’s been 1 whole day of marching already and I don’t want to trouble the troops by having them nervously bow whenever they see me.

And so, with this in mind, I was currently observing the troops.

Practically none of the 300 I started with were still with me. Even if there were any, I wouldn’t be able to recognise, or them me. Most of the troops now know me only by name but not by face.

In a strange setting where both men and women can join the army, military life isn’t all that different from a small society.

There were young couples, families of 3, 5, and other sizes. They would separate and go to their respective positions and duties in the day and reunite at night.

This arrangement is honestly a little cruel, but also a little fortunate. All in all, I was still in approval of it as families could be together after all.

Speaking of which, there seem to be many new generals after the reunion at Gucheng. Because none of them were talented in only 1 area, they were easier to accept into our fold.

The way Guan Ping addressed Feng Xian and Yun Chang as mothers even though she was more of a little sister was really comical. As for Chen Gong and Zhou Cang, apart from how Zhou Cang did not look at all like how I expected, I can more or less accept the both of them. I hadn't been able to speak with them at length yet but a chance should arise eventually.

"M, my lord!!!!"

Un? A suppressed cry of surprise came from behind me all of a sudden.

When I turned, I saw a girl with a braided ponytail looking at me with bulging eyes and a wide open mouth, the fruits she had held were now on the ground. She had a small, oval face and smooth eyebrows on top of big, round eyes. She looked so cute that I simply couldn't imagine her ever looking angry.

As for her clothing, she was wearing the standard military robes. Apart from that, she had on a somewhat old chest guard and 2 bronze wrist guards.

"What has my lord come here for?!,

Looks like I've been found out.

"Could you be here to spy on the bad habits of us soldiers? My lord, I have none at all. I don't even drink liquor. My only snack are fruits. Ah, they fell onto the ground. If my lord doesn't mind, you can have one."

"No, no need for that. I was just taking a walk."

"While you look like you're just casually strolling about, you're actually looking to catch some spied?! My lord, I'm not a spy!"

"..." Looks like she's an easily exciteable type. I squeezed out a smile, and made to quickly leave before more trouble could latch on.

"My lord!" But just then, she grabbed onto my arm all of a sudden and pulled be back just when I had taken a step away.

"My lord, I'm Chen Dao, and I came from Runan! I've always heard of my lord, and now I've finally joined my lord just as I've always wanted! Don't worry, my lord! No matter what

hardships I have to endure, I will help my lord accomplish his ambitions!"

As she said so, she continued to apply strength into her arms as she swung my arms up and down. Her strength wasn't small either, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that she was capable of sending me flying easily.

"I... I see. I didn't think I would have such a devoted fan."

"... Fan?"

"Ah no," Oops, I forgot the era I was in, "I didn't think I would have such a devoted follower."

"Ah! I'm nowhere near as good as my lord has described! As long as I can assist my lord, I'm perfectly satisfied!" She knelt when she finished.

"Eh! Please get up, please get up!" I hurriedly went forward to help her up.

Chen Dao, was it? That name doesn't seem very familiar. Although apart from Guan Zhang Ma Huang, and Guan Ping, Liao Hua, Zhou Cang, Wang Fu, I don't really know any other Shu warrior generals.

"Who was your general again?"

"General Zhao Yun, my lord!"

I see, so that's why she's standing so rigidly.

Gu~ Ah, my stomach is starting to make noises already.

"A, anyway, I'm really grateful for your support. Please do protect me under the premise of taking care of your own life as well in future."

I hurriedly ended our conversation as I wanted to go for dinner.

"M, my lord..."

"Umm, what are you crying about..."

I didn't think that words said for courtesy's sake would move her to tears.

"I just feel that, my lord is really too good to us... I heard that most of the troops were refugees who my lord took in. And you're so kind to someone like me..."

That was actually Yun Chang.

But I've gotten an acute sense of the gap between the poor and the rich in this era. From how things look, Chen Dao's household probably wasn't doing too well. And it is this sense of inferiority which has led to her behaving like this to me.

"Don't look down on yourself like that..." I said with a rougher, more forceful tone as I clapped her arms kindly, "I'll be counting on you in future!"

"Ah..." She hurriedly wiped away her tears and stood up straight when she heard me, and yelled out, "Yes!!"

Seeing how Chen Dao was like, I was beginning to feel that I hadn't thought enough about a lot of things. Indeed, this isn't the time to be solely concentrating on Yi De.

5,000 troops are watching me after all.

(TL: Chen Dao is an actual historical figure but is not included in the original fiction as the author felt that Chen Dao had too much of a character and role overlap with Zhao Yun. That should explain what Chen Dao is about.)

Chapter 22: Don't tell me this is on the way to Jiangdong (3)

Liu Bei POV

I was somehow able to extricate myself from Chen Dao, and I dragged my tired body and empty stomach back where I came from.

The sky had turned dark before I knew it, and most of the soldiers around seemed to have finished their dinner and were already cleaning up. Some were even faster, and had warmed up some wine, and sat outside their tent and began to chat with the others. The older ones began to tell stories of the first Han Emperor. I don't know how much of what they told were just exaggerations but those who listened seemed to be enjoying the stories.

Ah, I think the cook has cleared up the equipment.

I could get the cook to come and set up a small stove but this felt like an abuse of special privileges which I really wasn't comfortable with. Instead of bothering others, I might as well look about for some food. And if I really can't find anything, it's not like I can't live if I skip a meal.

Gu...

"..." Looks like tonight will be a long night.

"Eh? Xuan De?"

"Ah..." When I heard someone call out to me, my heart shook from fear that it would be someone troublesome again but when I turned, I saw that it was someone endearing instead.

"Ah, it's Gan Qing."

She was wearing her set of old, pink clothing and some cloth shoes which weren't really suitable for winter and came running over.

"Hehehe..." She had a jovial smile on her as she ran over.

"Where's Xuan De headed to?"

"I was just strolling about before dinner," I felt a little embarrassed about what I was about to say next, and scratched the back of my head, "And then I missed dinnertime while I was walking about."

"Eh? So Xuan De hasn't had dinner yet?"

I smiled helplessly and nodded.

"You could have gotten the cook out..." She muttered, as she placed her finger on her cute

lips, and said, “It just so happens that Lord Hua Tuo is out so I have an extra portion. Why don’t you come and eat with us?”

“Hua Tuo’s not around?”

“Un un, she’s having a discussion with sister Guan.”

It’s probably about Yi De.

Yun Chang has to manage the army in the day and when night falls, she busied herself with Yi De. She won’t wait for things to happen like me, and will do anything she can.

I just hope she doesn’t tire herself out.

Gu... While I was thinking, my stomach called out again. Gan Qing smiled, which made me feel embarrassed,

“I’m normally okay even if I skip a meal but I don’t know why it’s like that today.”

“As the saying goes, appetite grows with numbers.” Gan Qing bent down and closely inspected my face, “Maybe Xuan De is feeling more relieved and comfortable after we’ve reunited so your appetite has grown.”

“Un, I guess you’re right.” Come to think of it, my appetite has increased a fair bit these few days, “I’ll be eating with you then.”

It’s best to quickly eat. I don’t know how long my stomach will keep calling for.

“Xiao Mi— Look who’s here!”

“Un— Wa! It’s big brother Xuan De!”

Gan Qing couldn’t wait to surprise Mi Zhen and called out to her as she parted the curtains. When Mi Zhen saw that it was me, she put down the toy in her hands and flew into my chest.

“Oh~ Good girl, Mi Zhen!” I didn’t dodge her, and caught Mi Zhen as she flew over. Because there was quite a bit of momentum, I had to twirl about as I hugged her.

“Hahaha~” Mi Zhen seems to enjoy this.

I then slowly placed Mi Zhen back down as she hugged my leg with no intention of letting go at all.

“Un? Mi Zhen, have you grown taller?”

“Hehehe,” She proudly stuck out her chest at my words, “I’ve been eating all my food without being picky~”

“Good girl!” I bent down and stroked her small head as I began to closely inspect her. Her braids seemed to be slightly longer, and she’ll probably become a woman soon. But seeing her slightly thinner face made me worried.

She must have went through quite a lot when she followed Yun Chang on the way here. Though I believe that Yun Chang did her utmost best to care for these 2 girls, Gan Qing and Mi Zhen have definitely been through a fair amount of hardship.

“Here, Xuan De.”

Just then, a wooden bowl filled with rice was before me. Looks like Gan Qing’s back with food.

“Ah, thanks.” I thanked Gan Qing as I received the wooden bowl, and when I looked inside, I saw that there wasn’t just white rice inside. There was some braised meat as well. The colour of the meat was very good, and it glistened in the light.

“This meat is...”

“It’s a special for Xuan De~ I think Xuan De has been eating dried meat all this while right?” Gan Qing said as she placed the other dishes on the table, and called Mi Zhen over for dinner.

I see, she specially made some braised meat huh? Gan Qing is really caring.

... Wait.

“Gan Qing.”

“Un? What’s up, Xuan De?”

“Did you make this?”

“Yes, I specially made it from meat bought from the market.” She said as she smiled radiantly at me.

...

“U, umm, I think that such expensive foods should be—”

“Xuan De, I specially made it for you~ Try it quick.”

“Wu...” I really can’t say anything after she’s said this much.

As I looked at the delicious-looking pieces of braised meat, I couldn’t help but remember that they were made by Gan Qing and I began to grow more worried.

But how could I possibly back out now?

And so I drummed up my courage and picked up a piece of meat.

This was something that Gan Qing went to great lengths to make for me so I can't waste it even if it tastes terrible.

Ahen, I gathered all the courage I could ever muster and placed it in my mouth and closed my mouth immediately so that I could squeeze out a look of enjoyment even if it was terrible beyond imagination.

But...

"Un?" The taste of braised meat spread throughout my mouth, and I began to chew more quickly, "... Delicious."

"Eh? Really?!"

I nodded vigorously. Though it's not something that was out of this world, it was a very homely, warm taste that made one feel comfortable and satisfied.

"I really didn't think it would be this good! Gan Qing's culinary skills have really improved huh." As I expressed my astonishment, my mouth didn't stop with rice and the other dishes.

"Hehe, I've been practicing after all." Gan Qing ate slowly with a blissful smile on her face from my praise, "I can't do much, and can only support Xuan De in these areas."

"Support big brother!" Mi Zhen piped up loudly as Gan Qing said so. The 2 of them looked at each other and smiled.

Hai... I sighed inside. I've always felt that I owe these 2 a lot.

"We've never really had a time to rest after we left Xu state. It's been— Hard on you both all this while." I said as I ate to make it seem more natural, but the words still got stuck in my throat mid-sentence. I couldn't swallow my food nor could I say the words I wanted to say and only managed to finish my sentence after a moment's pause.

"Why are you saying such things, Xuan De? Mi Zhen and I have both decided to follow Xuan De of our own volition from the very beginning, and we've been prepared for whatever may come long ago."

"That's right, that's right! There's Xuan De here, and big sister as well so I like it here!" Mi Zhen gave a radiant, innocent smile.

"But I haven't even been able to spend time with you all..."

I've been busy with various things and have unknowingly neglected Gan Qing and Mi Zhen. Nor have I thought of them very much during the day.

"Xuan De is now the Xuan De of 5,000 troops and dozens of retainers so how could we possibly think of monopolising Xuan De? And anyway—" She put down her bowl and

chopsticks as she said so and held my left hand that was clenched tight out of regret, “Isn’t Xuan De with us now?”

Gan Qing flashed a strong smile, the same one that she had on her when we first met in the fields. I remembered that this was the plain smile that I liked and that I had missed very much.

As I looked at Gan Qing, my eyes began to tear up and my vision became blurry. Her hair was slightly soaked in sweat and I raised my right hand and swept her fringe aside and looked closely at her.

She didn’t avoid me, and stared into my eyes as she slowly blushed.

I looked at this cute, strong girl and smiled, “I hope you can continue to stay with me from now on.”

“... Un.” I could feel her intent, and her warmth from my hands.

“What about me?!” Mi Zhen asked as she pouted. I stroked her head, thinking that she looked really cute.

“Of course I hope that Mi Zhen will be with me as well~”

“Un! Mi Zhen will!”

The sky was now completely dark out but I haven’t finished my dinner yet.

We still have to march tomorrow but for now, I hope to spend just a while more with Gan Qing and Mi Zhen.

Chapter 23: Don't tell me this is on the way to Jiangdong (4)

Liu Bei POV

Tatatata... The sound of the horse hooves was deafening as we marched on. The noise was made even worse by the luggage of the riders that tended to have things which clanged, clattered and rang.

I followed the sounds and looked at the things that the ones around me brought.

Yun Chang had several bamboo scrolls, Hua Tuo had bags and bags of medicinal herbs on her pygmy horse that seemed to grow as the journey went on, Feng Xian had some vegetables, while Wen Yuan seemed to have some stuff as well but I couldn't tell what it was. As for Zi Long, her white horse carried almost nothing at all.

As for me, my possessions were few and simple. Part from heavy twinswords, all I had was the feather fan.

All this while, I've been diligently taking care of the fan. However, some feathers still fell off. I didn't dare to fix it up as I was afraid that any action might trigger or break something and make something go wrong in the future.

This was a particularly strong intuition that I was getting, and since it was very cold ever since winter came, I didn't touch the feather fan much as I waited passively for the moment when its secrets would be revealed.

"I'm so bored. We've been marching for so many days now." Wen Yuan complained just as I was thinking it was about time for her to do so.

"Well what fun could there be in marching?" Yun Chang had handed over her glaive to Zhou Cang and was now able to read her scrolls with her freed-up hands, "I have some nice books here with me, won't you take 1?"

"No thanks."

An instant rejection.

"How could you be bored during this journey? I'm so busy I don't have time for anything much." Hua Tuo said as she wiped the sweat off her brow and bent down from her horse to pluck some weeds from time to time.

No, those should be medicinal herbs.

"Lord Hua Tuo, you've really gathered a lot of medicinal herbs huh." Wen Yuan exclaimed, "Physicians really are different huh."

"What are you talking about? Who said these were medicinal herbs? Aren't these just

weeds?" Hua Tuo said as a matter of factly.

"Eh?"

Eh?

Looking at that look on Hua Tuo as though what she said was a given, Wen Yuan and I had baffled looks.

"Are you looking down on me?" Wen Yuan muttered.

"Though they may be weeds, they do have their uses~ For example, when you take this and that and mix them together, they can treat blade wounds. But if you use only 1 of them alone, then they are just normal weeds."

Eh~ So is this some sort of folk medicine then? But I wonder if this era's folk medicine is more ludicrous than those in the future. I'm a little suspicious but since it's Hua Tuo, I don't fully doubt the efficacy of her treatment methods.

"And this plus this can improve one's eyesight. I've been using it all along."

Un, I can completely doubt it now. Looks like it's completely useless.

"Umm um, is there any combination that can help Yi De regain her memories?" Yun Chang piped up.

I instinctively looked back at Yi De who was about 2 rows behind. She was sitting calmly on her horse while Zhou Cang on her left and Chen Gong on her right were bickering about something again. Yi De however was utterly unperturbed and continued to look forward with a calm expression.

After the last few conversations, she was now on guard against a few of us and I was beginning to get worried that she might just leave us sooner or later.

"I haven't discovered a combination with such an effect yet, or perhaps I have yet to find the materials for it." Hua Tuo shook her head as she searched her bags, "Perhaps she could try this and this, but I can't promise that it will work."

"Try that huh? Will there be any side effects?"

"Un, she might die."

"Isn't that really serious?!"

"Don't worry, I can dilute it, and we can try with just 30% of the usual dose." Hua Tuo said as she extracted a small bottle from her pocket and began the compounding process.

... Is it really going to be alright?

"My lord." A slow and quiet but powerful voice came from behind me, and I was assaulted by a sudden chill that felt like the sharp killing intent of an assassin. I only felt safe once more after I turned back and saw a pair of listless eyes with a scar below one.

"So it's Liao Hua huh."

"My lord, I will make sure to remember that expression of yours just now."

"... What is it?"

"Un, please have a look my lord." She took out 2 bamboo scrolls from her pocket and handed them to me.

I was a little stunned and only received them after a moment, "This is..."

"This is a new roster for the army that I've been working on in this period. Managing 5,000 troops at once might cause some problems so I split the army in 2."

Split the army in 2? I opened the bamboo scrolls, and saw that they were filled with the names of people and numbers beside them. There was no punctuation so it made it even harder to read.

What's worth mentioning is that the words are very beautifully written.

"Did you do all this?"

"No, Lord Chen Gong helped me out as well."

I see.

I closed the scrolls that I couldn't quite read and handed them back to Liao Hua.

"It looks good, I'll leave it to you to—"

"Xuan De." Just as I was about to hand the responsibility of this matter to Liao Hua, Feng Xian who was slightly ahead called out to me.

I followed her voice and looked ahead only to see that there was a tall mountain range ahead. It was fortunate, however, that the road was not completely blocked off. It was however, split into 2 and both paths seemed to lead to the other side as you could see light coming from the ends of both oaths.

"The mountain slopes don't seem to be holding together very well so if we go through a single path all together, the sounds might cause an avalanche so it will be prudent to pass through in turns." Yun Chang said as she rubbed her hands on the slope of the mountain. She applied strength into her hands, and a rock rolled down.

If we're dividing our troops and passing in turn, then—

“Everyone, there just so happens to be a complete roster here...”

“... Time to go.”

“Alright Xuan De, we’ll be leaving first then.”

“Un, be careful. Gong You, Hua Tuo.”

They both bowed to me before riding up the tail end of the contingent which slowly snaked into the narrow path.

“Now then, looks like the first division has entered the path completely.”

“Un, yeah.” I glanced at the roster as though I was actually perusing it, and replied Wen Yuan in the affirmative.

The general of the first division was Yun Chang, with Zhou Cang and Yi De as her associate generals. Liao Hua led the main body, and Hua Tuo and Gong You led the rear guard.

Un... That should be the gist of it.

“Xuan De will be coming along with us right?” Feng Xian said in a slightly weird tone as she swung her reins. I looked at her and saw that she wasn’t looking in my direction.

“Un, because I want to ensure that both divisions pass through safely so I can’t be passing through first.”

“Got it.” Feng Xian nodded as she tidied her hair and fixed her armour, but she didn’t look this way.

Come to think of it, Feng Xian was with Yun Chang when they crossed the passes and slew the generals right? I don’t know everything but it seems like Feng Xian did indeed act together with Yun Chang.

After we reunited, Feng Xian seems to have spoken a lot less than before. If this goes on, she’s going to become like another Gong You.

“Xuan De.” Feng Xian called out to me all of a sudden.

“Un?” I stopped my thoughts and looked at her. Her face seemed calm, but I could tell that there was turmoil beneath the calm exterior.

“Back when we first met, Xuan De told me that I should choose my own path. But after such a long time, and after going through so much, I’m starting to feel more and more lost.”

After hearing this, I was sure now that something did happen to Feng Xian while she was travelling with Yun Chang. Looks like Feng Xian is troubled over her path as well.

“Why do you say that?”

“I don’t have a reason for it. It’s just a feeling I have.” Feng Xian lowered her head as she said so, and began playing with Red Hare, “I always thought that I should meet violence with violence, and if I kept solving problems this way, eventually everything would be resolved and violence would never be used again. But now, I’m starting to feel that if you use violence even once, you can never stop.”

“... That is to say that, Feng Xian is starting to question the problem of using martial force?”

Feng Xian nodded.

“I’ve always felt unwilling to resort to martial force, but whenever I meet with a problem, I only use martial force to resolve them.” Feng Xian said, and paused. She then nodded to herself as though she were steeling herself for something, “To put it simply, I’m starting to hate myself for my talent in martial arts.”

She hates herself because she’s talented in martial arts huh.

She’s surprisingly self-reflective, and it seems like Feng Xian really doesn’t want to use violence.

But I’m unable to give her an answer about this as I myself am facing a similar problem. All I can do now, is give her time to think.

“You may be talented in martial arts, but I won’t force you to fight.”

“Eh?” Feng Xian frowned in puzzlement.

“In any case, if you’re troubled, then feel free to deal with your troubles. You don’t need to force yourself to fight.”

“... Can I? Really?”

“Of course. Feng Xian is most like herself when she’s a little ditzy after all.”

“Ah...” The wind blew and lifted Feng Xian’s hair, and brought dust about, making Feng Xian close her eyes. It was rather strong, and even my horse was roused. Only Feng Xian stood motionless in the wind.

“A, actually—” She closed her eyes, and frowned as she continued, “Does Xuan De think that I have any wo, womanly charm...”

“Un? Feng Xian, did you say something?”

The wind was really strong and noisy, and I was concentrating on controlling my horse so I didn’t hear what Feng Xian said at all.

“No, nothing.” When I finally got things under control and looked up, Feng Xian had her

stern look back on and sat up right. Seems like she has no intention of repeating what she just said.

"My lord (Liu Bei), you really are..." Wen Yuan snickered as she said so while riding behind us.

"General Lu, the first division has passed through."

"Ah, un. Advance!" Feng Xian yelled out as she brandished her double-sided halberd and swung it in the air. The troops followed suit and yelled out as they advanced in an orderly fashion.

Perhaps if it's Feng Xian, she'll be formidable even if she doesn't use her martial prowess.

Chapter 24: Don't tell me this is a reunion with Sun Ce (1)

Liu Bei POV

On this narrow path, many layers of branches stacked together to block sunlight from reaching the ground. If there were just a few more layers, it would probably resemble a cave environment. And thus, Wen Yuan has been sending reminders to the troops all the way to the back to be careful whilst marching forward.

From how things look, advancing in turn was indeed a wise choice as it would be a disaster if anything were to happen under these circumstances.

"Living in seclusion in these sort of mountainous regions wouldn't be so bad." Zi Long seems to like this environment however, as she looked about with her hand at her chin, looking as though she was already considering where she ought to build her lodge.

"Xuan De, if we do take the world in future, we should come here and live in seclusion when we retire."

"Isn't it a little too early to talk about retirement now?" I gave a slight protest. I'd never thought of this issue before, and felt weird thinking about such a thing at Zi Long's sudden statement.

"Living in seclusion huh."

"Un un, it does have the feel."

Eh? Feng Xian and Wen Yuan chimed in as well as the 2 of them closed their eyes and imagined what it would be like to live in seclusion.

"As I said, isn't it a little too early to think about this?"

"My lord (Liu Bei), you really don't get it huh." Wen Yuan said as she poked at my unromantic brain and made a face that looked like she was pitying me. I felt that it was a little rude of her but I didn't stop her from continuing, "All warriors have a desire to live in seclusion for the latter part of their lives in a place surrounded by nature when they retire."

"Well said." Zi Long added. Feng Xian nodded as well.

"Live in seclusion huh..." I decided to follow suit and imagine what it would be like as well.

It's been a while since I've been in this era, and naturally I didn't have a single ounce of desire to revise what I learnt in high school language classes. But I do still remember Tao Yuan Ming's poetry so I'll use that as inspiration. That simple life of farming and solitude should be similar to living in seclusion.

(TL: Tao Qian Tao Yuan Ming is a famous poet from the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Not the Tao Qian in Volume 2.)

It's actually kind of funny as I've always felt that living in seclusion would be extremely boring. Without computers, television, or any entertainment facilities, just hiding away in an unpopulated corner and farming away. No matter how beautiful the scenery may be, it feels rather aimless. Not to mention that having no one around would be dangerous as one got older so I naturally felt aversive to such a lifestyle.

But now that I've been here for the better part of a year now, it's been so hectic that I've not had the time to seek entertainment at all. And now, I've practically forgotten what it felt like to have an abundance of entertainment in life. This is probably the effect that living with the ancient people have on me.

"... Perhaps living in seclusion might be interesting." And so, I could see how it looked in my mind, and it gave me quite a good feeling about it too.

"Eh, it's fine if we just think about it. We still have a lot of work to do after all." When Zi Long saw that I was beginning to get interested, she burst my bubble. That's not fair when you were the one who brought it up.

But what she said is true. It's fine to think about it, but as Liu Bei– Or if not Liu Bei, then as Cao Cao or Sun Quan– I will never be able to see the day that the Three Kingdoms are reunited as one.

"Xuan De, let's stop talking for now. We're emerging from the path soon." Feng Xian said. While we were chatting, the light at the end of the path had become bright enough to light up the area already.

Looks like we're finally here.

I'd best not think about the matter of living in seclusion for now.

I never imagined that after we emerged from the mountains that before us would be the Yangtze River.

The Yangtze River now was rather different from that in the future. Not only was the water clear, the waves had a surging momentum that was unmatched by that of the future. The River was very choppy and bigger waves could splash up the tall cliffs. If one wasn't careful, one might be swept off the cliff.

I began to feel nervous as I heard the sounds that the waves made as they crashed against the cliffs. In this era, people would still be at the mercy of these waters after all.

What was really surprising was that there was a metal chain fence about the cliffs. Looks like the nearby county cities might have erected them for fear of people being swept into the river. The chains seem to be rather old however, as the black iron have long since been covered by a reddish brown. As for whether it could still save lives, it would be prudent not

to test it.

“Lord Lu Bu, have all the troops from the second division emerged from the mountains?”

“Un, most of the rear guard is out now.”

While I was having flights of fancy in my thoughts, Yun Chang and Feng Xian were doing their work as the overall commanders of each division. As for the choppy waters, the 2 of them didn't seem too concerned, probably because they had experienced navigating through similar bodies of water before we reunited. They did however, get the troops to stand in formation in a position that was closer to the mountains as a precautionary measure.

“Big brother, what were Lord Sun Ce's instructions again?” Yun Chang came over and asked me what the next step was after she was done with roll call and getting the troops in formation.

“Let me see.” I nodded, and took out a piece of silk that was covered in words from my pocket.

This piece of silk was given to me by Sun Ce through Xiao Yong. Apart from the usual greetings, it told us broadly the route to Jiangdong.

I opened the silk and took a closer look. What was written on it was very simple. After leaving Runan, we were to cross the Great Plains and head east, before heading southeast along the mountains.

“It should be here. It even specially mentioned a cliff.”

“So this is the cliff huh?” Yun Chang frowned and looked about.

I looked about as well but I didn't see anyone who was here to pick us up.

“It might be disheartening for me to say this.” Wen Yuan said after she looked about and walked over with a stiff smile, “But could it be that we came to the wrong cliff?”

She then pointed about, and there were a number of cliffs some distance away.

“...”

There are way too many cliffs in this place. Come to think of it, the riverside should be ridden with cliffs right?!

How should I put this? As expected of Sun Ce?

“Looks like we should go back—”

Dong *Dong* *Dong*!!!

The sound of firecrackers in the nearby forest interrupted the call to retreat by Yun Chang,

and sent everyone on high alert.

“Everyone, make preparations to engage the enemy!”

“General Guan, your blade!” Yun Chang reacted immediately and received her blade from Zhou Cang.

And immediately, the army began to descend into chaos. This couldn't be helped as most of the troops were rather knew. Heck, even I got flustered.

But just as I was unsure of how to react, everyone else yelled out orders and began to control the situation.

“All those resting are to stand up! Once you get back into formation, squat and don't move! Wen Yuan, get the main body under control.”

“Lord Zhang Liao! Tell the troops not to head toward the edge of the cliff!”

“I got it! Don't leave our lord (Liu Bei)'s side, my lord (Feng Xian) and Lord Zhao Yun!”

“Cavalry are to dismount at once! We don't have much space to maneuver here to be careful of arrows!”

“Get into a dispersed formation! When the enemy appears, destroy them like how we trained!”

“... Protect the supply caravans and be careful of above.” “Get the shield warriors here so they can protect the rear guard from large rocks and fire arrows.” “But be ready to abandon our supplies as it looks like the enemy will come at us from both sides.”

Dong *Dong* *Dong* *Dong*!

The firecrackers went off again but our army was mostly calm now from the incessant shouting and orders. Even I who was in the heart of the army could see that we were in formation now.

...

Pa- *Pa*-

After about a minute or so, the firecrackers stopped and all that could be heard were the sound of waves crashing into the cliffs.

We quietly waited for the enemy to attack and didn't dare to make any moves.

“My lord (Liu Bei), I feel that this situation is a little odd.”

“I feel the same. If they are robbers then they clearly picked the wrong targets.”

Wen Yuan and Zi Long were at my sides and expressed their suspicions about the situation as they kept their guard up.

But now that they've mentioned it, it is weird. Who could come and ambush us at this time?

Pa *Pa* *Pa* *Pa*

— Well done! To think you reorganised your troops and dispelled the chaos in such a short time. Xuan De, you really have a bunch of good companions huh.

All of a sudden, applause could be heard from the shrubbery, followed by some praise.

“Who is it?!” Yun Chang raised her glaive and threw it into where the voice came from with all her strength.

“... Hei!”

“Ha!”

At the same time, Liao Hua’s spear and Chen Gong’s arrow shot out.

Ding! *Qing*!

I’d thought that the 3 weapons would pierce the shrubbery in the area they were aimed at but all of a sudden, several long weapons came out of the shrubbery and deflected the glaive, spear and arrow.

“...” Feng Xian wordlessly prepared to charge forth.

But it was a good thing that my eyes were sharp and my hands were quick as I managed to stop her. I shook my head slightly at Feng Xian, and she kept her halberd.

The reason why I did so was because I could guess what was going on.

“Feng Xian, Wen Yuan, don’t you both think that this voice is a little familiar?”

“...”

“Familiar?”

— Hahaha! What? You’ve forgotten my voice already?

Along with the reappearance of the voice, several figures leapt out from the shrubbery and revealed themselves before us.

“Ah!” After they did so, Yun Chang was very surprised to the point where she cried out.

Feng Xian and Wen Yuan were also looking at them with bulging eyes, and they slowly lowered their guard. Hua Tuo, Gan Qing and Mi Zhen in the rear guard should be able to

recognise this girl.

As I thought so, I felt that I should stop thinking and extended my hands as I saluted the wolf-eyed girl who was speaking just now.

“Sun Ce Sun Bo Fu! It really has been a long while since we’ve met!”

Chapter 25: Don't tell me this is a reunion with Sun Ce (2)

Liu Bei POV

I should have expected this.

As I looked at Bo Fu who had a look of gleeful success on her face, I felt weak as I thought about how her prank riled us up so much.

“Lord Sun Ce, what are you...” Yun Chang hurriedly dismounted and walked over to Bo Fu with her horse. She probably dismounted as it felt that it would be disrespectful to question Bo Fu whilst she was still on a horse.

“I’m sorry Lord Guan Yu. Please rest easy, we did not bring our army.” Bo Fu understood what Yun Chang wanted to ask and immediately saluted her as a gesture to express her apology. After that, she clapped and several people appeared out of the shrubbery.

There are quite a few familiar faces.

“Xuan De, we meet again!”

“Everyone! It’s been a while!”

The 2 girls, a warrior with twin hook swords and a warrior with twin spears, that appeared before us struck up respectful poses.

“You both haven’t changed huh.” I said as I called out to the 2 of them, “– Lu Meng, Taishi Ci.”

A fair bit of time has passed since we fought together against Yuan Shu. Lu Meng still had the same braided ponytail and she was wearing her sky blue clothing with a red armband as she did then. Apart from her hair which has grown out a little more, she seems almost the same as when I last saw her. Taishi Ci was also pretty much unchanged. She had the same kind smile on, and didn’t seem to have grown any taller, and still used her hands to support her twin spears hanging behind.

I didn’t think these 2 would be here to receive us as well.

“Oi, Gong Jin, the instigator behind all this shouldn’t be hiding anymore, come out now!”

“Eh? Lord Zhou Yu is here as well?”

“That’s right,” Just then, Zhou Yu came out into the open and covered her mouth with her fan, “I have to show face for Imperial Uncle after all.”

Zhou Yu gave me a slight smile as she bowed while a breeze lifted her veil. The short stuff still felt as domineering as always.

"Though you said that, this isn't too friendly of us right... Ouch!" A rare male came out from behind Zhou Yu and got a vicious elbow blow from Zhou Yu just as he said a few words with a smile and fell to the ground.

"This is..."

"I'll introduce you, this idiot is called Lu Su, no need to bother about him."

"Lu Su?!"

Lu Su is actually a guy? This thought flashed in my head but after I thought about it, I realised this was actually normal. Looks like I completely accepted the logic of this world.

As I laughed bitterly at myself, Lu Su had gotten up and came over to me to greet me with a salute and bow, "Greetings Imperial Uncle. I am Lu Su Lu Zi Jing, and I joined after the battle with Yuan Shu. I look forward to getting to know you."

"Ah ah, yes so do I." I hurriedly replied. Because of how informal he was in demeanor, I forgot the rules of this era for a moment and extended my hand to shake his. Only when I saw a baffled expression on his face did I hurriedly retract my hand and salute him.

Saluting is an art, especially when meeting people for the first time. Yun Chang had said that it was normal to hold the salute for a longer time when meeting people for the first time and one could use this time to size up the other side and make a first judgement.

To me, I try not to size up women in detail as much as possible but since there was finally a man appearing, it should be fine for me to do so.

Lu Su wasn't tall, and his clothing was simple. He had tied his hair back haphazardly into a short tail and he had a little stubble on him. All in all, he looked like a slovenly person. But when you think about it, his demeanor does fit my impression of Lu Su as a mild and amiable person. The feeling I get from him is very different from the mean-eyed Bo Fu and Zhou Yu, who is always thinking. To put it simply, he's a lot more approachable.

Or should I say, as expected of Lu Su.

"Alright, you can get lost now." Zhou Yu stepped forward in front of Lu Su and swatted him with her fan until he left my field of vision and summoned 2 people out, "The ones that need to be introduced are these 2. The one with dark skin is Ding Feng, and the one on the other side with a strange hat is Xu Sheng."

"I'm Ding Feng Ding Cheng Yuan."

"Xu Sheng Xu Wen Xiang."

"Greetings..." I was getting a little tired of this, but I still had to go through with the pleasantries. And since she took the trouble to introduce me, I ought to make sure I remember them.

To be honest, I don't have a strong impression of Eastern Wu. All that I can remember, apart from some of the more famous individuals, is that they have an uncountable number of named administrative officials and warrior generals. Whilst reading Romance of the Three Kingdoms, I would always skip the names whenever a multitude of them appeared. While I knew roughly who was appearing when, I really can't name them.

I'm afraid I'll probably get to know many of Eastern Wu's leaders.

As for the 2 people in front of me, their looks are rather striking. Ding Feng was clearly someone who lived near the sea. Her hair was slightly bleached from being in the water for too long, and her dark skin was probably a strong tan. She looked like an unsmiling person on the surface, but from her half-closed eyes, she was probably just bored and irritated.

To her side, Xu Sheng had red eyes and wore her chainmail inside while wearing what seemed like a jacket with a hood on the outside. If she lowered her head, the hood could block her eyes. Unlike Ding Feng, or rather the opposite of Ding Feng, she looked like a genuinely unsmiling person. While she was greeting me, I noticed that her eyes kept wavering between me and Zhou Yu, as though she was checking to make sure that she was doing it correctly.

"My little sister recruited these 2. Strange-looking, aren't they?" Bo Fu nonchalantly placed her arms on the shoulders of these 2 at which Ding Feng's expression darkened. She looked like she wanted to shrug off Bo Fu's arm but felt that it would be rude and stopped mid-action. Xu Sheng, however, didn't move in the least.

"... No." Bo Fu was clearly using the wrong adjectives here. At least use 'special'.

But... Ding Feng and Xu Sheng huh, I'll make sure to remember these 2.

"Alright! The short prank is over now!" Bo Fu nodded as she placed her hands on her hips and stretched her neck.

She then pointed below the cliffs, "Let's head on down! Xuan De, I'll show you our ships!"

The ships were really big. There was no question about it. Just 5 ships were enough to carry all 5,000 of us.

When we saw the ships, all of us had shocked and impressed looks on our faces. I don't know what the 5,000 troops following behind feel but I can largely imagine how they would.

"The ship looks to be about 20 odd meters in height... How many can each ship carry?" Yun Chang said as she looked at the peak of the ship.

"This ship has 3 levels built in it. It can squeeze in 1,500 along with the required supplies." Zhou Yu said with her fan in front of her mouth, probably to hide her proud smile.

"Do these 5 ships have names?"

"No. We have about 30 or so of such ships in Jiangdong so there's no point naming them."

That's a lot...

"There's nothing to be amazed about, everyone. Unlike the north, Jiangdong is close to many large bodies of water which can be very difficult to travel in without large boats. In fact, a boat is almost necessary to get to almost anywhere."

Though Bo Fu had a look that seemed to be complaining about this inconvenience, all of us were still awestruck.

"We'll be really proud when 'Fei Yun' and 'Gai Hai' are finished."

(TL: I am unable to translate the ship names. Literally, it means 飞云: flying cloud and 盖海: cover[ing the] sea, so it's likely that Fei Yun is a fast ship while Gai Hai is a goliath.)

Since they have names for those ships, they should be pretty special.

When I looked at the ships, I began to feel impressed at the various craftsmen of this era. Even though technology was so backward, they could accomplish such wondrous achievements that people from the future can't even imagine or create. Perhaps the ancients are the more resourceful ones.

"Let's board, everyone." Bo Fu said as she gestured us to board the ships, "I've prepared a banquet on board, as repentence for making everyone alarmed just now."

Actually, I should have expected Bo Fu's prank. The only one who could do such things despite having such a lofty status and position would be Bo Fu.

Even though her eyes are so vicious, she's just like a kid. I thought, feeling a little sore at not being able to foresee what she did while sitting on the ship.

On the other hand, it seems like Bo Fu has taken big strides in improving her situation, as seen from her ships and the reception.

Though they had tricked us, the reception and service we received was really grand. Looking at the requirements to feed all of us, it must cost quite a pretty penny for Bo Fu.

I and Bo Fu, as the feudal lords walked ahead of everyone. Due to the strong winds that rocked the planks, I began to shiver as I walked shakily.

"Xuan De doesn't travel on boats often huh." Bo Fu, who was beside me, very smoothly put one arm about me while linking arms with me. Her fringe seems to have grown longer and I couldn't quite see her face.

"I'm fine, just a little shaky that's all."

"No, it's okay." Bo Fu continued immediately as her lips curled up, "Let me support you at least while you're here."

Chapter 26: Don't tell me this is a reunion with Sun Ce (3)

Liu Bei POV

After we entered the cabin, we followed Bo Fu along the corridors. When I took a closer look, I found that the wooden boards for the floor of the corridors had floral motifs on them. I don't know what they are but I was impressed by the workmanship.

The end of the corridors was the bow of the ship with a staircase that led upstairs. As I walked up, I noticed that there were wooden windows at every level. On the first level, there were some attendants and guards. The guards stood stock still and upright in the cabin and seemed unperturbed by the strong winds that blew in. Looks like they are very experienced at being out at sea.

"How long has it been since I last saw Xuan De?" Bo Fu said softly.

Though I think I won't have a problem walking on my own after boarding, Bo Fu still held me as she did while we were boarding.

"From what I remember, we last met in summer so it should be about half a year."

"Half a year huh." Bo Fu gasped as she let go with 1 arm and used it to flatten her fringe, "As the saying goes: Time flows ceaselessly day and night like a river. Seems like an appropriate use of it now."

(TL: Actual saying: 逝者如斯夫, 不舍昼夜.)

"It's only been half a year, there's no need to exaggerate so much." I smiled at the serious Bo Fu.

When she heard my words, she sighed, "A lot has happened to me this last half a year."

When she finished, Bo Fu pulled down her outer tunic, revealing her bare skin underneath. I wanted to look away but when I saw her bandages about her left shoulder, I got a shock and couldn't shift my gaze away.

"This is..."

"I've done a lot this past half a year for the sake of my ambitions in Jiangdong. At the same time, I've also made a lot of enemies." Bo Fu smiled, but I couldn't feel any good feelings behind that smile. What I felt instead was heartfelt melancholy and fatigue.

The unification of Jiangdong huh. It's been hard on you, Bo Fu.

"Is it serious?"

"... It's alright." Bo Fu squeezed these words out after a long while in silence.

I didn't pursue the matter when she didn't continue. All I did was silently, apply more strength into my arms and support her as she did for me.

The banquet was held on the 3rd floor of the cabin, and it was surprisingly big, in fact it was wider than most main halls. And because this was the highest level, the ceiling was rather high up, almost 10 meters tall. There were also intricate carvings on the walls and silk carpets as part of the decour. All it needed were some brick red pullars, and it would be of the same level of luxury as the Court hall in Xuchang.

As we entered the main hall, Bo Fu and I naturally sat at the head while the generals sat along either row behind us. On the left was Bo Fu's side consisting of Zhou Yu, Lu Su, Lu Meng, Taishi Ci; on the right was our side consisting of Yun Chang, Yi De, Feng Xian, Zi Long.

As for the others, they were all spread out on the other ships. This allowed them more freedom, as well as watch over the troops on the other ships. As for the 4 of them who came with me, I'm actually rather worried.

Firstly, Zi Long. Wen Yuan should have been the 4th but because she couldn't stand this sort of atmosphere, Zi Long came to make up the numbers instead. Zi Long is the sort who would definitely accept to come along for something like this, and so she did to the woe of me.

From the moment I sat down, Zi Long has been staring at me fixedly. When I took a closer look at her, I saw that she even had a brush in her hands and was ready to take down notes on her palm.

I don't need to think to know that she plans to write down all my mistakes in this banquet. My sitting position, how I hold the cup, manner of speech etc etc, she would take down everything and give me a sermon later on so I'd better brace myself.

Secondly, Yi De. Yi De was actually named by Bo Fu to join in the banquet. It was clear that Bo Fu's side did not know about what happened to Yi De so if any incident occurs later on related to the past Yi De, not only will it be awkward, it will also be bad for Yi De herself.

I snuck a peek at Lu Meng, who was the one from Bo Fu's side who had the strongest connection to the past Yi De, and saw that she was staring at Yi De. I get the feeling that she will do something once the banquet starts.

While I was deep in my thoughts, Bo Fu had already grabbed her wine cup and raised it above her head.

"In the expedition against Yuan Shu, I fought together with Xuan De. Back then, Xuan De had given us extraordinary support which allowed us to prevail against Yuan Shu. Unfortunately, Xuan De was in a rush then and he wasn't even able to leave a few words of farewell. I, Sun Ce Sun Bo Fu, have always repaid my favours manifold so I decided then that should Xuan De ever have need for help, I will definitely come to his aid." As she said so, she looked at me and pushed her cup out at which I hurriedly picked up my cup and clinked cups with her, "Everyone, Xuan De is now here to visit Jiangdong under my invitation. I, Sun Ce Sun Bo Fu,

am truly excited about this and hope that Xuan De can gain something from this trip.”

As she finished, she tilted her head upwards and downed the wine in the cup in 1 gulp.

“I look to Bo Fu for your understanding should we happen to do anything inappropriate in Jiangdong.” I gave some standard words for courtesy’s sake and raised my cup and downed its contents as well.

“But of course. Xuan De and your people need only bother to enjoy yourselves.”

Pa– *Pa*– Bo Fu laughed out loud as she patted my back rather forcefully, making me cough and spew some wine out.

Even though she was injured, her strength was still surprisingly large huh.

After I recovered, I looked down and saw that no one was listening to what Bo Fu and I said at all. Everyone was engrossed in drinking wine and eating meat. Only Taishi Ci and Zi Long were listening, and when I raised my cup, Zi Long followed suit as well and drank along with me.

“Don’t drink so much, Gong Jin. Why are you drinking so much when you know your liver isn’t strong?”

“Geh... Zi Jing! Are you bullying the weak and sick!?”

“No, look at you, you’ve begun to spout nonsense already...”

On the other side, it appears that Zhou Yu who had been drinking non-stop for a while now has gotten drunk and Lu Su has been taking care of her like an attendant, as he helped her wipe her mouth and persuaded her to no avail. Seems like Zhou Yu’s intelligence drops a fair bit once she gets in touch with alcohol.

But from my perspective, it seems like Zhou Yu and Lu Su’s relationship is more than just comrades. I’d never seen it that way before but now that they are both of different sexes, I can’t help but to see it that way. But the more I thought about it, the more it felt weird.

“Zhang Fei! We haven’t seen each other in so long, why haven’t you come to talk to me at all huh~”

Un?!

On our side, Lu Meng had made it to Yi De before I knew it.

“L, lord Lu Meng, it’s been a while.”

“Un, it’s been a while Lord Yun Chang.” Lu Meng only gave a sentence in reply to Yun Chang’s attempt to distract her before returning her gaze to Yi De.

Cold sweat was running down my back. I looked nervously at Yi De and saw rhat she had an

utterly baffled look on her face.

"This isn't bragging but my martial prowess has greatly improved from before so if we have the time, we should definitely have a bout again." Lu Meng wasn't tall but she was filled with pride. She put 1 foot on the foot rest of Yi De's chair, and 1 arm on the arm rest as she pushed her cup to Yi De, "But for today, we should have a good drink. Cheers."

"..." Yi De looked at Lu Meng for a long while before she turned her gaze away and wordlessly picked her cup up and clinked it with Lu Meng's and saying in a quiet and respectful tone, "Cheers."

She clearly didn't remember who she was but she still managed to follow through. Perhaps only this Yi De could do it.

Lu Meng smiled and nodded her head with satisfaction before she downed the contents in her wine cup.

"Lu Meng, how can you behave like that at a banquet... Return to your seat quickly."

"Oh~"

Lu Meng only nodded and sauntered back to her seat after Bo Fu waved her hand and chided her.

Only when Lu Meng sat back down on her seat did I rest easy. Yun Chang probably feels the same way as I do.

"I let you see something unsightly, Xuan De."

"No..." I didn't know how to react to Bo Fu's apologetic words but since she put her cup out, I decided not to say too much and clinked cups with her.

Jiangdong's wine is stronger than the wine in the north. Though it's not at the level as the wine from Xuchang, it's sweet and easier on the throat.

"Kahaa..." Bo Fu sighed in satisfaction as she downed her wine.

The Bo Fu now is behaving exactly like a middle-aged uncle.

"Bo Fu should watch your health, and drink less if you can."

It would be terrible if her wound opened up because of the effect of alcohol on her heart.

"It's fine, it's fine. I can still drink a few cups for courtesy's sake. Compared to Gong Jin, I'm in much better shape." Bo Fu gave an exaggeratedly loud laugh as she said so. But her laugh grew softer and softer and I began to feel the sense of melancholy I'd felt before from her.

"Bo Fu, have you been too busy with work lately? Or are you a little tired?"

Bo Fu suddenly frowned and her eyes bulged when she heard what I said. She seemed like she wanted to turn to look at me but she stopped her gaze halfway and looked at the table in a daze.

While she stared fixedly ahead, her body rocked lightly from left to right. She then took a deep breath before giving a long exhalation.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't been involved in the matters of ruling ever since I unified Jiangdong." Bo Fu said as she absentmindedly swirled her wine cup, "And because of the injury, I have passed on all authority to my little sister."

So she's passed over Jiangdong to her little sister. That means she passed it Sun Quan huh. But come to think of it...

"Zhou Yu will advise on external affairs, Zhang Zhao will advise on internal affairs... Huh?" I said these words which I suddenly recalled.

"Eh? How did you know, Xuan De?"

"Ah, no. I just..." I didn't think that Bo Fu's ears would be so sharp to pick it up so quickly. Naturally, I didn't have an explanation for this.

"I guess it's expected of Xuan De huh... Even though we only knew each other for such a short time, you already understand me so well."

Good thing that Bo Fu didn't press me on this, and seems to have arrived at a satisfactory answer.

But if what I remembered wasn't wrong, then after Bo Fu delegated responsibilities to his main officials, he should have...

My gaze slowly turned to the wound at Bo Fu's shoulder. From the amount of bandages, it was clear that the wound wasn't small and Bo Fu was obviously grievously wounded. So she survived even after all that huh...

"But since you're recovering already, Bo Fu will take back the reins soon right?"

"Hahaha..." I said what I thought was an obvious conclusion but Bo Fu guffawed loudly as though I'd told a joke.

After she stopped laughing, Bo Fu's smile disappeared and she closed her eyes as she said, "Xuan De, I'm tired. I don't want to get involved with these troubled times anymore."

Chapter 27: Don't tell me this is a reunion with Sun Ce (4)

Liu Bei POV

Because the waves were exceptionally violent, we stayed at the riverside for a few days and only set off once the tides receded and the waves subsided.

In these few days we lived rather comfortably and got to know how wealthy Jiangdong is, seeing as how Bo Fu was able to feed all 5,000 odd of us amply. It was much more relaxing than how we rationed ourselves while we were on the way here.

That said, there was much trouble as well.

Most of our troops came from the north so they were unused to spending a lot of time on a ship, and so nearly half of our troops suffered from seasickness. There were also some who'd fallen sick as well. I originally wanted our troops to put up on land for the night along the way to Jiangdong but Bo Fu insisted we stay on the ships as it wouldn't make sense for guests to sleep outside. On our side, Liao Hua, Chen Gong and Yun Chang also agreed as they thought it was a good opportunity to train the adaptability of our troops.

Yun Chang is so serious with such things, even though she is vomiting so much.

And because of all this, Hua Tuo has been very busy attending to the sick with Gan Qing and Mi Zhen assisting her.

As for me, I've been taking classes in politics, finance, international relations and military affairs. Ever since the Xu state 3 reunited, they had come up with a timetable with Zi Long and each one of these 4 taught me one of the aforementioned subjects. The way they taught these subjects was exactly in the same fashion as in high school and I was a little nostalgic at first but by the next day, I was thoroughly sick of it.

Sometimes, I would sneak away under the pretext of helping Hua Tuo's medical squad but Zi Long would always catch me p, though she would relent when she saw how moved the troops were at seeing me.

I really didn't think that the troops would respect me as much as they did, and if I get the opportunity, I must ask Zhou Cang and Chen Gong why.

These were all things that happened before we set off, and right now, we were on the way to Shouchun.

I have just finished Zi Zhong's finance class, which involved heavy use of the abacus. I'd thought that the abacus was a simple tool and easy to pick up from what I saw in television shows but the way Zi Zhong described it, it was as though it were a magical tool.

It's a good thing that the second period is Gong You's. Though there's the saying that one shouldn't bully the honest and kind, I've already decided to catch a break in the midst of my

work and came out to the deck to catch some fresh air.

As I stepped out of my room and headed to the stairs, I found that ship was rocking quite a bit and didn't dare to make any large movements as I carefully headed down while holding on to the handrails.

There was something like an open air terrace on the 2nd floor so I decided to head there instead of all the way down.

But just after 2 steps, a large wave came for the ship and I was unable to dodge in time and could only hurriedly cover myself with the sleeve. After the wave hit, I looked down and saw that the soldiers on guard duty were standing still and straight as ever, completely unperturbed by the wave. Their willpower and balance is rather extraordinary; I would have become fish food if I hadn't been holding on to the handrails.

Even if the waters were calm, it seems like travelling around by boat is still rather perilous in this era. I can somewhat understand why the people on both sides of the shore have a hard time now.

As I looked into the distance, I could somehow make out the other 4 ships in the mist. They don't seem to be moving much from here but it should probably be the same on those ships as it is on this one.

Just 5 ships alone looks rather impressive enough. I wonder how it would look with 80 ships in the Battle of Red Cliffs?

Though I can't quite imagine it now, I felt my heart tense up at the thought that such a momentous event would happen soon. The Battle of Red Cliffs is, after all, a different level from Guandu.

"Xuan De? Why're you here? It's pretty dangerous."

Just then, 2 people walked out from the inside of the 2nd floor. The one who walked in front seemed rather relaxed while the one behind who was protecting the one in front, was looking left and right, afraid that something might happen.

"Ah, it's Bo Fu and Lord Lu Meng." I quickly saluted and bowed.

Ah yes, apart from my 4 'teachers', my Jiangdong host, Bo Fu, and her personal guard, Lu Meng, was on this ship as well.

"You don't need to be so formal with me. All of Jiangdong's officials and generals keep doing this but I'm quite irritated at such things."

"Lord Liu Bei."

Bo Fu casually waved her hands for me not to be so formal while Lu Meng bowed seriously.

"Speaking of which, what's Xuan De doing here? Don't you have work to do?"

This was something that Bo Fu was very good at but she still asked me anyway.

"Un... How do I put it, I guess I'm just taking a walk." I laughed to hide the fact that I was playing truant in my classes and decided to change the topic, "C, come to think of it, how long will it take for us to reach Shouchun?"

After I finished, Bo Fu did not reply immediately. She put her index finger into her mouth and sucked on it, making a sloshing sound of her tongue against her finger as her breathing became heavy. During this time, I felt a little awkward at this.

She then extended her finger to the skies, at which I finally understood that she was checking on the direction and speed of the wind.

She closed her eyes as she felt the wind, and opened them after a short while and said with a smile, "You're lucky, Xuan De. The winds and the current are in our favour and we should reach within 3 days or so."

"3 days huh..."

"Why, not too used to staying on a ship?"

"Un... A little." If I said I was, that would be a lie but the real reason wasn't that, "I'm just worried about Yi De who's on another ship."

Now that Yi De has completely forgotten all of us, the only ones she ever interacts with are Yun Chang and I but now that she's on another ship, and given how isolated she is now, I'm rather worried about her.

"Umm... Has Lord Zhang Fei really lost her memories?" Lu Meng asked with a heavy expression in disbelief.

After the banquet from before, Yun Chang and I had explained what happened to Yi De with Bo Fu and her subordinates. This wasn't the sort of thing which could be hidden forever so we thought we might as well let them know to prevent anything untoward from happening in future.

At Lu Meng's question, I could only express my regret, "We got separated after our loss at Xu state. I don't know the details of what happened but it seems like Yi De injured her head. Looking at how she is right now, it must be true."

I did have the thought that Yi De might have been joking, and not just once. But reality was exceedingly cruel, and it's impossible for the Yi De I know to have such good acting skills.

"How can this be... She actually thinks she's an administrative official! She's clearly an upstanding warrior!"

So that's what you mind.

"Be it administrative official or warrior general, I've decided to respect Yi De's choice. Even if Yi De has not lost her memories, and if she wants to be an administrative official, then she can do so."

Who decided that Zhang Fei has to be a warrior general anyway? There are times when even warrior generals who can write and draw will go be administrative officials, no?

"Un..." Lu Meng sank into thought, possibly about what she could do for Yi De.

Bo Fu clapped Lu Meng's shoulders as she looked at her, "Lu Zi Ming, there's nothing here so go and patrol the ship."

After Bo Fu finished, Lu Meng did not stay for long and only bade Bo Fu to be careful before leaving.

Looks like Bo Fu really does have a lot of enemies in Jiangdong seeing as having Lu Meng be her personal guard and follow her everywhere means that there is actually a possibility that there could be someone who could harm her on this ship.

Just then, I felt a slight tug on my sleeve.

"Bo Fu?"

"Xuan De, I've been thinking for these few days." Bo Fu said and turned towards me, "I feel that I should apologise to you first."

"Eh? What for?"

She paused and nodded before she continued, "I've always felt that Xuan De's path has been smooth sailing, and compared to mine, it seems like everything, be it people, timing or anything else, is on your side and all you needed to do was to go with the flow. But after listening to what has happened to you since we parted ways, I found that this is wrong and it's not been easy for you at all."

After Bo Fu finished, she stretched her back as a show of her being relaxed and sighed again.

"Compared to Bo Fu, what has happened to me is nothing."

I have been hiding and ducking here and there while Bo Fu accomplished the unification of Jiangdong.

"The unification of Jiangdong is only in appearance. There is still a lot that needs to be done internally." Bo Fu said as she straightened up, "I can handle wars and battles but I'm nothing when it comes to policies and ruling."

Bo Fu clearly meant something with those words. Just then, the wind blew strongly once more and blew her fringe up, revealing her beast-like eyes which I hadn't seen clearly in a

while. And those eyes revealed how jaded and tired she was.

"Ah... Oh no, my fringe got blown again..." Bo Fu said as she hurriedly pulled down her fringe.

"Bo Fu, looking at your eyes again after so long, I still think they're really beautiful."

"Wh- What are you talking about!" Bo Fu became shy at my words and blushed.

I'd already seen, and felt, it when Bo Fu said she was tired.

Sun Ce Sun Bo Fu, you should rest when you need to. Whether it's us or the people of Jiangdong, I'm sure they will understand.

(TL: Say what you want about MC but he knows what to say and when. Nobody's as naturally smooth as him.)

Chapter 28: Intermission

Meng De POV

By right, the weather ought to have turned warm by now but because we were up north, it was still severely cold. So cold that even a chilly breeze brought pangs of pain to my head.

“Big sis, there are some marshes up ahead so we can’t go straight and have to go around them.” The one next to me who spoke up was my other little cousin, Cao Ren. Unlike Cao Hong, she wore full plate. It was weird though, as I remember that she usually wears a set of knee-length short robes with a very long belt that reaches the ground.

Despite her usual garb, one can’t afford to underestimate her as this little sister of mine is far more devious than I am.

“Why did you wear plate now that we’re taking on the Wuhuan? I don’t remember you being this cautious when we were fighting Ben Chu.”

“Wuhuan and Yuan Shao are 2 different things altogether. No matter how strong Yuan Shao’s troops may be, they are only Central Plainers so the tactics they can use are only so much.” Cao Ren analysed with a relaxed expression, “The Wuhuan troops are famous for their cavalry archers, who use poison-tipped arrows and specialise in marauding attacks and divide and conquer tactics, which are our bane. You never know when a stray arrow might come so some precautionary measures must be taken.”

I nodded, pleased at what I heard. This was her strong point. Though Ren and Hong are talented in martial arts, Ren is more prudent in how she approaches things and always thinks before she acts, and this is always a great help to me before battles.

“Meng De, I took a quick look just now. The route when going around is quite difficult and will delay us by at least 3-4 days...”

“We’ll do it, Yuan Rang.” I said to Yuan Rang on my other side, “I’m willing to pay the price of time. It’s far better than meeting with a grievous loss.”

And so, Yuan Rang went to issue the order.

I understand where she’s coming from. Troop morale declines during long marches but this can’t be helped now. We’ve already left Ji state so we can’t return without accomplishing nothing.

“Has Cheng Yu returned?”

“... Imperial Chancellor.”

A moment after I spoke, Cheng Yu appeared on my side and matched the pace of my horse.

"How is it on Yuan Shu's side?"

"Yuan Shu's eastern route is closer to the marshlands and they've made the decision to go around them."

Yuan Shu isn't taking a risk either huh? Well that saves me the trouble of notifying them.

"Yuan Shu took the initiative and accepted the call to arms, why is that?"

"Probably as repentance for what she did before. Declaring herself Emperor in Wan city incurred the ire of the masses and now that she has rejoined the Imperial Court, she is probably planning to repay it through service."

Of course, I don't think Yuan Shu is doing this of her own accord, and Yuan Shao probably pushed her to do so. She probably plans to install another ally in Yuan Shu in Court to help her in her future battles against me in Court.

"Yuan Shu is young and lacks capability. It was clear in her battle against Sun Ce in Wan city that her ability to command is lacking. Should we really be depending on her in the upcoming battle?" Cao Ren said as she lay down lazily on the horse's mane. How could she feel comfortable even with such a steep angle?

"Yuan Shu's capabilities may be lacking, but those 2 who serve her are more than capable enough."

Like that Yan Xiang girl for instance, she has quite a bit of foresight when approaching problems. Ben Chu has also loaned out Tian Feng and Ju Shou to Yuan Shu for this expedition. If I haven't guessed wrongly, then Tian Feng and Ju Shou must have been the ones who got Yuan Shu to take the long route around.

Never mind, let's leave the other side for now...

"Ren, do you know where Feng Xiao is?"

Ren turned to me while still lying on the horse and shook her head, "Lord Guo Jia is pushing herself too much. She shouldn't have come."

"Perhaps she feels that this battle is too important and wants to witness it for herself."

I understand how Feng Xiao feels but it is because I understand that I wish she didn't come. Right now, Feng Xiao is somewhere in the main body and secretly directing the troop movements through Jia Xu, which is why there have been no problems so far which have reached my ears.

Feng Xiao, don't you dare collapse from this.

Die!!!!

Just then, intense bays for blood came from the side and I immediately put my guard up as I

looked to the left.

“Big sis! The Wuhuan cavalry are charging over from a safe route in the marshlands!”

What! The enemy knows a safe route in the marshes? Damn it, they now have the geographical advantage!

“Prepare for battle!” Yuan Rang’s anxious order could be heard from the main body.

Chapter 29: Don't tell me this is a reunion with Sun Ce (5)

Liu Bei POV

Bo Fu had said that it would take 3 days or so, and it did take 3 days or so. Whilst I was counting the days every day on the ship, we reached land by the 4th day. Everyone has been suffering all this while so it's good that our sea journey has come to an end.

As I left the ship, I got a good feel of land underneath my feet before looking afar. Out of the corner of my eye at the edge of my field of vision was Shouchun city.

Its city tower wasn't tall but the continuous pillars of smoke that rose above the forests gave it away.

I then looked downwards and saw that beneath my feet, the road to the city was not a dirt road that resulted from haphazard clearing of the forest but a proper road that was paved with stones that was more comfortable to walk on. In fact, it felt like the sort of running track you see in parks. Looks like Bo Fu and her people have put in quite a bit of effort into building up the infrastructure.

"How is it? Jiangdong hasn't disappointed Xuan De right?" Bo Fu smiled confidently with a look that said 'praise me quick' as she folded her arms across her chest.

"Un, we haven't entered the city yet but I can smell the scent of peace."

The air here doesn't smell of blood, or of dirt, only of fresh greenery. Besides that, it was quiet as well, a peaceful quiet.

"Huhuhu, I'm very impressive, aren't I~" Bo Fu said proudly as she stuck her chest out.

"Even though this was all Zhang Zi Bu's work..."

After Bo Fu came out, Zhou Yu emerged from the ship as well, and happened to hear Bo Fu's words at which she delivered this remark with a look of contempt.

"Wu..." Bo Fu, who was exposed, withdrew her neck but then raised her hands immediately as she protested, "M, my decisions were on point as well! Back then, Liu Yao actually wanted to turn Shouchun city into a military complex!"

"Alright, alright, alright, Bo Fu's decisions are the best."

"Stop patronising me!"

"To be honest, our lord's decisions then were indeed helpful. If it weren't for that, this would have become our advance base." Lu Su added in, hoping to end this conversion well.

"Zi Jing, I see you think the same way as well!"

“Lu Zi Jing! Can you stop spoiling Bo Fu! The more you praise her, the more she loses her drive!”

“I don’t, Gong Jin. Gong Jin! Don’t walk so fast.”

Zhou Yu huffed and puffed as she took big strides forward, completely ignoring any manners a retainer ought to have to their lord. Lu Su followed quickly after her as well. At this, Bo Fu didn’t seem to mind, and seemed to be pleased at Lu Su’s support just now.

Compared Meng De’s side which places a lot more emphasis on the difference in positions, I feel that Bo Fu’s side which is more like that of companions suits me more.

A retainer-lord relationship is undoubtedly a complicated one and it is necessary to draw certain lines but being too serious about things is a little too much especially for me when I have neither a country nor have I declared myself Emperor.

“Come, Xuan De. I’ll show you around Shouchun city.” While I was thinking, Bo Fu had held my hand and was pulling me along as she ran towards Shouchun city.

“Ah... The rest at the back haven’t even come ashore yet!”

“It’s fine, it’s fine! Taishi Ci will help to settle them in! Don’t need to worry, Xuan De.” Bo Fu turned and flashed me a bright, refreshing smile as she said so.

Back when we first met, she would never have shown me this sort of smile. Looks like she feels a lot better without her obligations weighing her down huh.

Alright, I came here to see Bo Fu to begin with anyway.

Awesome.

I couldn’t but be amazed at the sight before me.

Back in the present day, I would read some novels when I was bored. The capital cities described in these novels always had peach trees with flowers blooming in the distance, green trees providing shade, neat rows of houses made of green bricks and grey tiles, and the passers-by would greet each other amicably and engage in lively conversion. From near to far, from the outside to the inside, it would look like the perfect image of a golden age of peace and prosperity.

And the present day Shouchun, fit the image of that story.

“To be honest, if I could, I would have waited for another 2 years for the revitalisation of Jianye to be completed and then I would have brought Xuan De to Jianye. Jianye then would definitely be more beautiful than this place.”

As Bo Fu said so, a look of pride appeared on her face beneath her fringe. It was as though

Shouchun city was a child she had painstakingly raised. Perhaps for Bo Fu, she has probably put in more blood, sweat and tears into Jiangdong's initial development than she would into raising a child.

"Come." Bo Fu said as she pulled my hand and led me into the city.

"Oi, won't you get found out if you just walk on in like this?"

"Hehehe," She laughed cheekily when she heard my words, "Honestly, I don't make a lot of public appearances so the ordinary people don't really know what I look like."

"Eh? Is that so?"

"Of course. I feel that it's so much more exhausting to speak to the ordinary people instead of soldiers. They admire and respect you but they always ask you for this and that."

Looks like Bo Fu is the type who is afraid of the ordinary people huh. But this works in our favour so that's good.

"Seeing how well Shouchun city has been built up, Bo Fu must have put in a lot of effort. You should show your face a little and let the ordinary people shower you with admiration—" When I said this, I saw that Bo Fu was looking at me with her eyes fully revealed, and I got the hint that Bo Fu wasn't happy and didn't continue.

After a short while of silence, Bo Fu's expression returned to normal, and she slowly said, "I don't need to be admired. It's more tiring that way."

Bo Fu's words felt nostalgic as she'd said something similar the last time we met. I couldn't help but guess that Bo Fu just hated others to have expectations of her.

"Alright, let's leave this aside for now. Xuan De, where do you want to go to first? A confectionery stall or the weapons shop at the race course?" She pointed about the city as she said so. Looks like she knows the city well.

"Bo Fu, you're really familiar with this place huh."

"But of course I am," She puffed out her chest again, "Before we moved the capital to Jianye, I lived here for a very long time. I even know the names of the oldest inhabitants of the city."

Looks like Shouchun is something like a second hometown for Bo Fu huh.

"But even if you said all that, I can't really think of anything immediately." Honestly, there's no place I want to go to in particular, "And I also thought that the first thing I needed to do after coming here would be a meeting in your guest hall or something..."

Hahahahaha— As I finished my words, Bo Fu broke into raucous laughter as though she had heard a joke, and only stopped after several minutes.

“B, bo Fu?”

Was it really that funny?

“I’m sorry, I just thought of something interesting, that’s why.” Bo Fu immediately explained probably because she felt it was not very respectful to me, “Honestly, there was supposed to be a meeting but it has been postponed due to a comical reason.”

So she was triggered by that comical reason. Whew, that scared me.

“Honestly, you were scheduled to meet with my little sister now but...”

“But?”

Bo Fu paused and shrugged her shoulders, “But she’s ran away and we can’t find her.”

Eh?!

“Ran away?!”

“Unfortunately, you heard it right.” Bo Fu nodded. I can’t really see what her expression is right now but she should be having a helpless smile on, “How should I put it? She got forced into my position all of a sudden so she probably isn’t very used to it.”

Even if you aren’t used to it, you don’t need to run away right?

“Xuan De! Where have you run to?”

“My lord, don’t think you can skip today’s finance lesson just because you’re quick with your feet.”

Wu... Is this Zi Long and Mi Zhu?

I just got to Shouchun so why do I have to be studying!

“Bo Fu, please help me stall them.”

“Eh? Xuan De?”

Before Bo Fu got what I meant, I’d already rushed into the crowd. I finally got to land today so I’m having a holiday!

I don’t know how long I’ve been running for but I was beginning to feel tired and decided to stop as I looked about. Seeing that Zi Long and the rest couldn’t be found, I figured that Bo Fu has probably helped me stop them somehow and heaved a sigh of relief.

I was actually admonishing that Sun Zhong Mou whom I haven’t met yet but now I see that I’m no different from her, so I thought self-deprecatingly as I slowly walked in Shouchun

city's residential district and calmed my breathing down.

"Watch out! Dodge!"

Eh? Before I knew what was happening, a force came at me from the right. There wasn't too much power behind that force, but because I was still drained from the trip, I lost my balance and fell to the ground.

And in the next instant, all I could see was a tiger skin hat.

Chapter 30: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Sun Quan (1)

Liu Bei POV

After being stunned for a couple of seconds, I finally realised that a stranger had knocked into me.

This wasn't the first time I was knocked to the ground so I'd craned my neck instinctively to prevent my head from hitting the ground. As I lay on the ground with my head bent upwards, I could feel a certain weight on me.

"Ah— It hurts—"

And it was this organism that lay on me which moaned in a graceful voice. As she slowly began to move after regaining her senses, she kept rubbing her face against my chest which made my thoughts run wild.

From where I was, her tiger skin hat completely covered her face and all I could see was some reddish hair. Looking further down, I saw that she was wearing a light red fur cape. From her garb, it was clear that she wasn't an ordinary citizen.

"U, umm... Are you alright?" I asked politely as I gingerly peeled her off my body as I grabbed her slender arms.

"Ah ah ah, I'm fine, I'm fine." When she realised that she had knocked into someone, she hurriedly withdrew her hands and tried to get up, "Eh? — Ah!"

"Ah ouch!"

Because of her frantic actions, she lost her balance as she stood up and fell back down onto my waist with enough momentum to make me cry out.

"Ah, umm, sorry."

"You..." I opened my eyes as I endured the pain and was about to scold her but I forgot what I was about to say when I saw her

She had short, red hair and was currently looking at me with eyes that were out-of-focus and looked really pitiful. She wore a red plate skirt with a white center, and because of its short length and her sitting position with both legs spread open, her white and smooth legs were revealed up to her thighs. If I were to look even further, I would probably be able to catch a glimpse of the mysterious wonderland.

Speaking of which, do things like 'panties' exist in this era? I'm really curious...

No no no, how can I be thinking about this?!

"Umm, please get up first." I concentrated and suppressed all my emotions and closed my

eyes to give her time to get up.

"Ah, ah, sorry." She was still rather anxious and I only opened my eyes after I no longer felt her weight on me. Seeing that she had stood up, I too got up.

As I got up, I didn't forget to look about for those 'devils'. It's a good thing our commotion here wasn't too loud and obvious and didn't attract any attention so naturally Zi Long and the rest didn't come.

"Un... Un..."

Just then, I realised that the red haired young girl in front of me was anxiously looking about as well with a worried expression while she clutched both hands in front of her chest.

Seeing that she was running pretty quickly earlier, could she be chased by some people?

"May I ask what happened? You seemed to be in a rush."

"Ah, no, nothing, it's nothing." She hurriedly replied as she waved her hands.

This feels really suspicious, though it's not too appropriate for me to say this.

Leaving her aside, it looks like I'm completely lost. If I remember correctly, we came in from the west gate, so it's best that I head north for now.

Ah... Which way was north again? Not good, my sense of direction is gone. Did it go out of whack after that accident just now?

"Ah, they've caught up!" All of a sudden, the red haired young girl gave a surprised cry and paced about frantically before resting her gaze on me, "Umm, sorry about this!"

"Oi, oi!"

She ran behind me and clung on tightly to my clothes before waiting for my reply and trembled as she hid behind me with her head lowered.

What was going on?

"Oi— Xiao Tai, have you seen her?"

"No, speaking of which, sister Jiang, are you seriously looking?"

"Of course I am— Ahen."

"You're clearly just eating meat skewers."

Some distance away, 2 women who stood out very much with their surroundings were speaking to each other loudly. The one who walked in front was tall and had brownish skin that was slightly less dark than Ding Feng's. She wore clothing that had armour inlays which

revealed her shoulders and swaggered about. The shorter girl wore very striking clothing that didn't match the era at all and was chasing the tall girl with a frown. It was obvious that this girl was more serious and careful than the tall one.

"Could these 2 be looking for you?" I felt a small head nodding profusely behind me as I said so.

Looks like she's being pursued as expected huh. But looking at how serious those 2 are, she probably won't be discovered even if she doesn't hide.

"Are they gone?"

"No."

"And now?"

"No, can you be a little patient? You actually asked again right after I answered."

"... Okay." She paused for a moment.

"Then what about now?"

"It's only been a second... Ah, they stopped."

"Eh?!"

"They're walking over here, seems like they found you out."

"Eh eh eh!!"

"Sorry, I was just teasing you. They actually went away already."

"What! You dare tr— Ah! Ouch."

Looks like she bit her tongue.

"Are you alright?"

"Wu... It hurts..." She moaned.

What an interesting fellow, I thought as I shifted away from my position in front of her. She didn't let go at first but after she remembered that they had gone, she let go.

"Yar sho evil, how dae yo twick me!" She threw a very comical tantrum, as though she had a carrot in her mouth.

"I'm sorry, I'm the one who was wrong." I still apologised anyway, and decided I should leave soon as I couldn't let my guard down now, "In any case, your pursuers are gone so you'd better find a place to hide. I'll be leaving as well."

"Ah, wait." I made to leave after I finished but the red haired young girl grabbed on to me. I looked at her, and saw that she was smiling again.

"No matter what, you saved me, and my big sister said that one should always repay her favours manifold so I'll repay this favour with anything as long as I'm able to."

You're making a big fuss out of nothing, is what I wanted to say but since she offered and I happen to have something troubling me, why not?

"Umm, are you a local?"

"Un... I guess so." She was a little ambiguous in her reply but seemed rather proud.

"Then do you know which places are a little more crowded?"

"Are you from elsewhere?"

I nodded, "I'm from the north."

"Oh, a merchant of sorts huh."

I sank into silence for a moment before nodding, "I guess so."

"Then you've found the right person. Not only can I help you find your way about, if you have any goods from the north to sell, just let me know and I'll make the necessary arrangements." She patted her chest as she did so, but it seems like she put a little too much strength as she coughed a few times. She then smiled before she continued, "That said, I don't know the specifics and I have to hand most of it to Zi Bu."

Is it really alright? From what she said, it seems like she's a rich young miss from an illustrious family.

"Well then, shall we be off?"

"Un, alright!" She happily began to walk but she then thought of something and turned to me and said, "I'm rather famous in Jiangdong but northerners probably don't recognise me."

And so, she reported her name.

Sun Quan, Sun Zhong Mou.

...

I don't just know you. Anyone who knows a little bit of history in the future should have heard of this name.

Chapter 31: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Sun Quan (2)

Liu Bei POV

Shouchun's street market were mostly pretty cramped, and could only fit 2 people walking side by side at most. And it was this narrow distance which had to fit effectively almost half of the inhabitants of the city. Add to that the merchants and moving carts and it's really, really cramped.

Even though it was called a street market, Shouchun city's street market wasn't actually a simple street market. Normally, street markets would be empty in the wee hours and the various peddlers and merchants would gather during the normal operating hours and display their wares. In the evening, business would slowly wind down and they would pack up. Some would go home, while others would head on to the next market or city.

As for Shouchun city, many of the merchants and peddlers actually lived in the city. Their homes were where their stalls were so when they left their house in the morning, they just picked a convenient spot and set up shop. in the evening, they would just pack up and turn around to head back home.

And most of the merchants in this city gathered in the north of the city. During the normal operating hours, they would continuously advertise their wares and services using their voices. This made it seem more like a market than a loose and sparse collection of street stalls.

Though the goods seemed a little lacking to me, and some were even calling for barter trade, it was very vibrant and crowded indeed.

"It's really bustling with activity huh."

"Hmhm, impressive isn't it? My big sister and I really put in a lot of effort into building up this Shouchun city."

I couldn't help but be impressed and voiced my thoughts while the red haired girl who bounced along beside me puffed out her chest just like the wolf-eyed girl and bragged in a very cute expression.

"Very impressive, very impressive."

"Wu, that reaction of yours is a little too patronising." Sun Quan pouted.

Well I did hear the same words from your big sister just now.

"But you really are different huh," She frowned as she looked at me with a wry smile and a meaningful expression, "You actually know who I am."

Well of course I do.

"I am a merchant after all so I hear things during the normal course of my business."

I continued to use the setting that Sun Quan had unilaterally applied onto me. I didn't have any purpose for doing this, I just did so because it seemed like it would be more interesting.

"But even so, you didn't seem surprised at all when you saw me."

Well of course I wasn't.

No, to be honest, I was a little surprised inside. But the surprises I've been met with since coming to this era have been far too many and perhaps I've also had the mental preparation that 'this person ought to make an appearance soon' so I wasn't all that surprised. At least not to the point where it would show on the surface.

"What a weirdo," Sun Quan didn't pursue the matter at my silence, and increased her pace.

"But that's good too as it means less trouble for me." She said as she looked about at the various curios on display.

"But even if I'm alright about it, won't the ordinary people of the city recognise you?"

"That's fine. Though I have appeared before the ordinary people, my teacher instructed me not to descend from the city tower so I just yelled out to the city as I stood high up. The people couldn't see me then but my throat really hurt after that." She said, and hen added on, "Ah, I have quite a few teachers. The one I was just talking about is Jiangdong's famoys Zhang Zhao Zhang Zi Bu."

Another familiar name. I'd heard Zhang Zhao's voice back in Xu state but I've never seen her. After our short meeting, I could tell she wasn't a simple person so I'll very likely get to meet her soon.

But what can I say? Should I say as expected of the old hand Zhang Zhao? That said, I personally feel that having that sort of high and mighty show is a little too early. But that's just my personal thought.

"What do you think about this?"

While I was occupied with my thoughts, she'd picked up a small wooden carving from a stall and brought it to me. It was carved in the shape of a lion and seemed like one of those Chinese Imperial Lions you see outside famous buildings or temples, but it also had some differences from those. Perhaps this might be a mythical creature from a Jiangdong folklore that has been lost in time.

I received it, and felt about the carving before taking a close look, "The craftsmanship is very good."

I don't really know how to appreciate carvings but I gave that conclusion from the smooth texture and intricate lines. It really hits me at times like these, and I'm really impressed at

how good the craftsmen of this era are.

"Master carpenter, how much for this?" But my answer seemed to please Sun Quan and she asked the carpenter for the price.

"2 '合' of grain."

Looks like he wants grain huh, but I don't know how much 2 '合' is.

(TL: Neither do I, it's difficult to find the correct reference as measurements differ every dynasty nor was there a common unit throughout China even.)

"I don't have grain with me now, why would someone go around shopping with grain on her?" Sun Quan complained but she still wanted to buy it.

As for the carpenter, she paused for a moment before waving as he continued, "If you really like it, then take it first. Just bring me the grain tomorrow."

Eh? So easy-going?

"Alright, thanks." Sun Quan didn't hold back at all, nor did she take any further assurances and left with the wood carving.

I followed up, but was still feeling lost, "Umm, can you really leave with it just like that?"

"Yes, didn't he say that it would be alright to bring him his compensation tomorrow?"

And just 2 '合' too, Sun Quan added, but I still didn't know how much that was.

"Isn't he afraid you might regret the purchase or the price later on? What if you don't bring the grain tomorrow?"

An agreement between strangers should be written down in black and white at least. If it were in the present era, it would have been normal to at least leave a cellphone number. But even though what I said was logical, Sun Quan gave me a look that seemed like she didn't understand what I was saying.

"Why?" She said relaxedly, not moving her gaze away from the wood carving, "I've already bought it so why won't I give him the grain? And what does he have to suspect me for since I've already bought it?"

That and that isn't the point, is what I wanted to say but I felt like it was because my sense of values was different from them. In the end, it all boils down to trust.

Perhaps I'm just ignorant of the ways of this era.

"What's up?"

"No, just take it that I didn't say anything just now." I retracted what I said before, and

accepted the setting before me.

There's nothing strange about a peaceful city where its inhabitants do not keep what isn't theirs and have no need to bolt their doors at night. In fact, wouldn't that be a good thing?

"Hai..." Just then, Sun Quan sighed all of a sudden, and her mood seemed to skydive all of a sudden.

"Umm, what's the matter?"

"Hai, just my own problem." Sun Quan turned her head away and pouted before continuing in a helpless tone, "I'm actually supposed to go meet this Imperial Uncle from the north today and it's troubling me."

So you're sighing because of me huh, But since you're talking about me, and since I've asked, I might as well continue the conversation.

"What's wrong about meeting that Imperial Uncle? He came from so far to see you too."

"But I don't even know him," Sun Quan seemed to be a little withdrawn as she said so, "Teacher Zi Bu said that I was new and was afraid that I would fall for diplomatic tricks."

I don't even know how to use diplomatic language effectively so how could zi possibly trick you?

"And I'm tired out enough everyday as it is already." Seems like Sun Quan's complaints are not over, "Gong Jin teaches me military strategy and tactics, Zi Bu teached me governance, Tai and the rest keep fighting me. Lu, Ji, Y, Fan are all not kind either. Do you know how much I have to study everyday?!"

Her voice grew louder and louder as she went on, and by the end of it, she was practically yelling angrily.

"I can understand."

"No, how could you possibly understand?,

No no no, I really do understand. Hearing that she is also going through that sort of crammed education really makes my heart ache. Even though our backgrounds differ, it was clear that Sun Quan was now facing the same issues as I was.

It's so touching to meet someone who is suffering the same way I am.

"Ah, why are you crying?"

"Ah? Ah." Only when she said so did I realise that I was moved to tears,a nd hurriedly wiped them, "No, I understand you too well."

She looked at my expression and her suspicion seems to have grown.

"What a weirdo," After a long while, she finally said these words again and continued, "But you aren't off-putting."

She began to swagger ahead. I didn't pay much heed to her words either and followed behind her as I considered if I should reveal my identity to her.

I smiled bitterly inside. It's going to be difficult to do so at this point in time, "But maybe that Liu Bei fellow is a good person."

"Ah, that Imperial Uncle did have that name." She clapped in realisation but then felt that something was wrong and looked at me with a frown, "But how did you know of that name?"

"Umm..."

How am I supposed to explain this away? I sank into silence, not knowing what to say when all of a sudden, a voice came from behind me.

"Xuan De! You better be prepared!!!"

Eh?

Before I knew what was going on, I felt my neck get grabbed and something was held against my back so I lost my balance and fell backwards.

When I finally opened my eyes amidst the pain, the Xu state 3 and Zi Long appeared before me.

Chapter 32: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Sun Quan (3)

Liu Bei POV

After being caught by my ‘teachers’, naturally I couldn’t continue roaming the streets of Shouchun. My unilateral holiday was greatly inflated by them and I received a thorough scolding that only ended after Yun Chang intervened on my behalf.

Thereafter were my usual lessons. How much actually went in is another matter altogether as I continued to think about Sun Quan whilst the lessons were ongoing.

I can still remember the bewildered innocent eyes Sun Quan looked at me with while I was taken away by Zi Long. When I thought of this, guilt filled my heart.

It was supposed to be just a prank, and I was planning on revealing myself at a suitable time but now that I wasn’t the one to reveal the truth, the prank has become a scam.

And it was this that has occupied my thoughts thus far. It was now late at night, but I continued to sit on my bed and think about this as I indulged in self-hatred without a care for food or drink.

What if the future alliances fail because Sun Quan hates me after what happened today? Would the outcome of future battles change because of this malicious prank of mine?

Even if they didn’t, just being hated by a girl alone is unbearable enough for me. I had no appetite and sighed as I got up stiffly and made to exit the room.

The moon in Jiangdong seemed brighter, and larger, than the one in the north. Tonight should have been a formal meeting between Sun Quan and I, where we might appreciate the beauty of the moon as we engaged in discussions. But they have not sent anyone to receive me yet.

This made me anxious as it felt like the calm before the storm. Moreover, if anyone was to blame, it would definitely be me. Perhaps what I need to think about now is how I should kneel and beg for forgiveness.

“Argh!!!!!!” All of a sudden, a face that had the whites of its eyes showing appeared from below the handrails with very strange movements.

“Waa!” I was thoroughly frightened by that face, and shakily took several steps back and fell backwards as I tripped over the door ledge, even losing my sight temporarily.

I didn’t wait for my sight to recover, and used both hands to help myself up, and actually failed once, making an embarrassing sight before I was able to get up.

“Ahahahahahahahaha–” And following that, there was a long, raucous laughter.

Wh, what is going on? Could it be that there are monsters in Jiangdong!

“Sister Jiang, stop fooling around.” A short figure crawled out of a corner in the room. Because of the shadow from the light of the candle, I couldn’t see what she looked like and could only hear her severe tone.

“Ahahaha, aiya...” Over here, the person who was mistaken as a female ghost revealed herself as she clambered over the handrails with deft movements.

She took a few steps forward and appeared in my field of vision. Before I could take a closer look, she stopped and bowed.

“I apologise for just now. I just wanted to have good relations with Imperial Uncle.”

How is this supposed to foster good relations, all you will do is make yourself be hated, I thought but didn’t say.

“Sister Jiang, you’ll only make yourself get hated.” The short figure said as she stepped out from behind the shadows. Looks like she felt the same way as I did.

By now, I was finally able to get a good look at these 2 which gave me a surprise, “Eh? Aren’t you both...”

The tall girl had tanned skin and was wearing a red square cloth on her head while she wore off-shoulder clothing with plate inlays. The short girl had a cross scar on the left side of her face and was wearing very odd clothing. I don’t know if it’s because it’s late at night, but she seemed tired as her eyes were half-closed and her head was tilted as though she was about to fall asleep.

Weren’t these 2 the ones Sun Quan was hiding from before?

“May I ask if there is a problem?” The short person asked with a look of puzzlement when she saw that I was about to say something.

“Ah, I got it. Did you happen to see us this afternoon?”

Wu...

“Is that true, Imperial Uncle Liu?”

“Your silence means consent.”

Wu... I wanted to give some excuse but I got overridden and exposed by that tall woman. Saying anything at this point would just be too shameless.

Even though she’s so big and loud, her intuition is quite keen huh.

“Really, why didn’t you say anything if you saw us.” The one called sister Jiang said as she scratched her head and sighed, “Do you know how difficult it was for us to find our lord?”

"Sister Jiang was just enjoying herself as we searched the streets and left all the work to me." The short girl looked at the tall girl with a look of contempt before turning to me with a frown that made me tremble, "But this only makes things difficult for us, Imperial Uncle. If our lord was kidnapped, we wouldn't be able to deal with it."

Her words were a little harsh but I can't refute her point. Back then, in Sun Quan's eyes, I was just a stranger. If I were someone with evil designs, then Sun Quan would be in danger.

No matter how you look at it, what I did was wrong. I feel like I always fail to consider enough things before taking action and I only recognise my mistakes after they are pointed out.

"But our lord got quite the shock when she heard that you were the one she was supposed to meet. Hehehe," The tall one gave an evil laugh as she said so.

At her words, I felt my heartstrings tighten, "And how is she now? Is Sun Quan... Lord Sun Quan angry at me?"

"Anger huh... Doesn't feel like it." The short one was still tilting her head, and paused for a moment before continuing, "She's still having her lessons after all."

Eh? She's still at her lessons?

"It's already so late, shouldn't she be resting now?"

"Our lord skipped all her lessons today so she can't rest until she has compensated for what she missed today."

"There was once when she even went at it for a day and night non-stop." The tall one added.

Eh? I sighed inside, grateful at the benevolence of my own teachers, and also sorrowful for Sun Quan.

But really, was there really a need to go that far?

"Is Imperial Uncle thinking 'do you really need to go that far?' or something?"

You guessed it again. Good on you, tall girl. I silently gave her a thumbs up inside.

"That really can't be helped. She's our lord so she has to learn all there needs to be learnt." The short girl said to me, with a sad look on her face.

When I heard this, I slowly closed my eyes. Indeed as she said, there is a lot to learn as a feudal lord. Unlike in the future where all you faced was pressure from teachers and parents, here you had to live up to the expectations of all the ordinary people under your jurisdiction. If you failed, it wouldn't be something as simple as retaining. You could lose your life. For newbies like Sun Quan and I, there was a lot more to learn than we could even imagine.

But...

“Is that really okay?”

“... Imperial Uncle?”

My recurrent problem is back again, and my thoughts which I shouldn't be verbalising are coming freely out of my mouth.

“I feel that, even if she is a feudal lord, Lord Sun Quan is only in her teens. Can't you give some time to play? It doesn't need to be a lot, but wouldn't it be nice to give Lord Sun Quan some time to let her do some things she likes?”

“But Lord Zhang Zhao and the rest have lofty expectations of her. Even if we wish to lighten the load of our lord, we have no authority to do so.”

That Zhang Zhao is no ordinary administrative official. This, I'm fully aware of. But to me, I hope that I can help others do what I'm not able to.

“I don't know how much I can help with regards to Lord Zhang Zhao but I'm willing to try at least.”

“Un... I don't recommend you to do so.”

“Go on, go on. Go and get scolded until kingdom come.”

The 2 of them looked at me with the conviction that I would fail.

Honestly, I'm not actually sure if I can even accomplish anything but this is all I can do for Sun Quan. Though I do hope that Sun Quan can forgive me for my prank if it does succeed.

“What was it that you wanted to say to me?” All of a sudden, a child's voice came from behind me.

Chapter 33: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Sun Quan (4)

Liu Bei POV

My gaze shifted to where the voice came from and under the light of the candle, I could see a figure standing in the doorway.

The one standing there was a little girl in her early teens. Her features were exquisite, a cute little nose and a similarly small mouth that was closed tight, with a pair of black, charming eyes. Her hair was very long but her fringe was tied back, which made look even more youthful. Her long robes were so long they seemed like they would fit a 2 meter tall big man. When she walked most of it dragged along the floor.

That said, I had a weird feeling when I saw her, as I could feel the aura of a mature adult which was at complete odds with the child I saw before me.

Whose little girl is this? I thought as I approached the child.

"Little girl, are you lost?"

"Oi oi oi..."

"I, imperial Uncle?!"

Un? Why are the other 2 people frozen to the spot?

"I ask the Imperial Uncle not to touch me unnecessarily." Just then, the child in front of me swatted my hand aside as she said so, "And don't face me with that hypocritical face of yours."

Wh-

Th, this kid, isn't she too audacious!? And those words aren't befitting of her age at all. Speaking of which, what is this sense of déjà vu I'm getting? And why does this voice feel so familiar?

"And you 2!" The little child pointed to the 2 behind me, and they trembled as they hurriedly stood up right, "I told you 2 to invite Imperial Uncle Liu over yet what do I see the 2 of you doing here?"

"I'm terribly sorry, Lord Zhang Zhao."

"Sorry, Lord Zhang Zhao."

The 2 of them bowed deeply as they apologised after they received scoldings from the severe voice.

What? Lord Zhang Zhao? I blinked twice and looked at the little child who was about as tall

as my waist as my heart began to race.

“*Ke* *Ke*...” Zhang Zhao gave a couple of fake coughs as she placed her arms behind her back, “As I was asking, what were you going to say to me?”

Watch your words. Look at who you’re speaking with.

Zhang Zhao widened her eyes slightly as she looked at me. She didn’t continue after stating her question but her expression was warning enough.

This pressure is borne from one in a position of unquestionable authority. And I am now experiencing firsthand the reason why the 2 warrior generals behind me are so deferent to her.

Now then, next is...

I silently took a step forward and saluted as I bowed before I began to say the words I hadn’t thought too much about, “Lord Zhang Zhao, I heard that your lord is presently still at her lessons?”

“... And so?” Zhang Zhao paused for a moment before she continued, and it seemed like she knew what my intent was, “Could it be that Imperial Uncle wishes to plead for mercy for my lord?”

“I do indeed have that intent.”

Pa

Just as I finished, Zhang Zhao took out an exquisite folding fan out and began fanning herself, “Pardon my impudence but does Imperial Uncle not feel responsible at all that my lord is studying till now?”

“I...”

“If Imperial Uncle had not abetted her, wouldn’t my lord have been caught and brought back much earlier? Early to learn, early to sleep. This would not have come to pass.”

“That isn’t the main point, no? Aren’t your lessons too much to begin with?”

“Sun Quan Sun Zhong Mou is the offspring of Sun Jian, the Tiger of Jiangdong, and the younger sibling of Sun Ce, Conqueror of Jiangdong. Therefore, she is not an ordinary person to begin with, nor can she live as one. Presently, she is the lord of Jiangdong, and it is an imperative for her to learn as much as she can. My lord is not a prodigal genius so she has to work extra hard to make up for it. Dare I ask what is wrong with this? What is impermissible about this?”

As she said so, she turned the topic onto me, “Look at Imperial Uncle, a royal relative, and a Court official with the position of a state Governor and a well-respected name known

throughout the world. Despite how low you've fallen, your generals and troops still remain loyal to you. Dare I ask Imperial Uncle; for the people, for your troops, for your generals, for your officials, for all of whom who remain loyal to you, shouldn't you be putting aside your selfish desires and work hard for them?"

Wu... Zhang Zhao's words were very logical, and she even completely destroyed any moral high ground I had. While she was speaking, I didn't dare to interrupt and quietly listened but now that she was done, I didn't know what to say.

When she saw me like this, Zhang Zhao continued, "To put it simply, Imperial Uncle should stop thinking about shirking his responsibilities and seek to advance himself as much as he can, as quickly as he can. Otherwise, taking the world and restoring the Han is just empty talk." Zhang Zhao said as she flicked her long sleeves, "Personally speaking, I oppose your coming to Jiangdong but out of respect, I still decided to speak with you for a bit so I asked Zhou Tai and Jiang Qin to invite you over. But I never imagined that you were such a lowlife and am very disappointed."

As she finished, Zhang Zhao did not allow me to explain myself or react in any way at all and waved her hands as she left. The 2 beside me straightened their backs and hurried forward.

As for me, instead of persuading her, I got scolded instead and could only stand there in a daze and watch Zhang Zhao's back as she left.

What Zhang Zhao said, is the right path for a wise ruler to take. Personally speaking, though I'm supposed to be Liu Bei, I wouldn't consider myself a wise ruler.

Perhaps for me, coming to Jiangdong is itself a show of weakness and failure, and my persuasion would have only become words that would hinder Sun Quan's development.

"Lord Zhang Zhao, please halt."

"... Un?" Just then, a resolute voice came from the other side of the room and drew in Zhang Zhao's attention.

Just as I was guessing who it was, the sound of footsteps coming closer could be heard, and soon a figure appeared at the doorway from the other side.

"This is..." Zhang Zhao looked over and asked who it was.

The one who appeared lowered her head as she said, "I am an Associate General in my lord's service, Zhao Zi Long of Changshan."

Chapter 34: Don't tell me this is a meeting with Sun Quan (5)

Liu Bei POV

Why is Zi Long here? I was extremely surprised as I looked at Zi Long who was respectfully bowing to Zhang Zhao.

“Zi...” I was about to call out to her when I noticed her gaze that told me she wanted me to listen for now and stopped speaking.

“Zhao Yun Zhao Zi Long? The silver spear general who served Gongsun Zan?”

“That is I.”

“Oh—” Zhang Zhao caressed her hair at the back of her neck and showed a look of interest.

“I’ve heard of it over the past few days, seems like you’re Imperial Uncle’s military tutor?”

“Indeed.”

“How is Imperial Uncle’s progress?”

At this question, Zi Long snuck a peek at me before turning her glance away as she continued, “Honestly speaking, none at all.”

“Oh—” Zhang Zhao drawled again. Zi Long’s words naturally left me no ground to stand on at all.

“General Zhao Yun is an extraordinary talent. Now that you serve Imperial Uncle Liu, I’m afraid things are tough for you.”

“Honestly speaking, that is indeed the case.”

Wu... She gave me no face at all.

Just when I thought the combo attack would continue, Zi Long suddenly straightened up and looked into Zhang Zhao’s eyes.

As she stared fixedly and resolutely at Zhang Zhao, Zi Long delivered her words slowly, “Be that as it may, my lord has something in him that none of us subordinates be it administrative officials or warrior generals can ever hope to compare.”

“Oh? Could it be your lord’s ancestors are present in him? Or can he use the Tao techniques?”

Zi Long shook her head as she brought her hands to her chest, “My lord has a heart that loves one and all.”

"A heart that loves one and all?" Zhang Zhao placed her folding fan in front of her mouth, but this did not hide her smile which extended to her eyes, "Are you joking, General Zhao Yun?"

"I'm not spouting nonsense. My lord truly has a heart that loves one and all, Zi Long turned to me as she said so, which stunned me, "I haven't heard everything that's been said thus far but I don't need to ask to know that you must have been fighting for someone else again."

I stood there in a daze and only hurriedly nodded when I realised she was speaking to me.

"My lord never gives excuses for himself nor does he snatch benefits for himself, and he will always bear the burden himself. But when it comes to others, no matter who it may be, if my lord feels that it is illogical, he will definitely speak up." She turned and continued as she faced Zhang Zhao, her hair billowing up making her look heroic, "And I feel that it is this which makes my lord a good lord."

"... Un." Zhang Zhao sank into silence and scratched her eyes as she replied.

"I'll let the other things slide, but I heard you say some inappropriate words about my lord which I hope you can take back." Zi Long blinked, and when she opened them again, there was a fearsome and forceful look in her eyes, "We can say what we want about our lord, but as an outsider, isn't it a little beyond your position to make such comments?"

"... Oi, you're being too full of yourself." At Zi Long's words and actions, the tall girl at the side took a step forward with a similar look in her eyes that was completely at odds with how casual she was before.

"... Un." The short girl stopped the tall girl by hugging on to her waist but her gaze became sharp as well as she stared wordlessly at Zi Long.

The air became very heavy in an instant.

"Zi Long..." I called out to her softly, but she ignored me. Looks like she's ready for a fight if it does happen.

Pa *Pa* *Pa*

Just then, Zhang Zhao became clapping all of a sudden.

"To have such a loyal and understanding subordinate, looks like Imperial Uncle Liu has good eyes huh." I didn't dare to reply as I didn't know if it was directed to me or if she was speaking to herself. After that, Zhang Zhao nodded as she continued, "Alright, I'll take back everything inappropriate that I have said. Imperial Uncle Liu, if I have offended you in any way, I seek your kind understanding."

Zhang Zhao then bowed to me.

"Ah... Ah! No no no, not at all." I hurriedly bowed back.

I don't quite understand what has happened but it looks like everything's good now. If we went to blows, things would be bad.

"Well then, that's that for now. I'll be retiring for now."

"Ah, Lord Zhang Zhao." I felt that I should still speak about the original matter and called out to Zhang Zhao before she could leave. At the very least, I hope I can achieve something, no matter how small it may be.

"Is there anything else?"

"Umm, about Lord Sun Quan's lessons. I beseech you to consider it. Even if it's just for a few days, please let her rest."

"..." Zhang Zhao stood still and sank into silence for a moment before she continued forward, and said in a very small voice, "I'll think about it."

"Ah! Thank you very much!" Seeing that I had made some headway, I hurriedly bowed, and only got up after I felt that she was gone.

I then turned to look at Zi Long and saw that she had returned back to normal again.

"It's a good thing you were here, Zi Long."

I had suffered a fair bit of scolding and insults before but Zi Long came in time and helped me out which allowed me to somehow succeed in my endeavor.

I'd always thought that Zi Long was an obsessively serious and overly strict person so I didn't think she would so vehemently defend my dignity here. Perhaps I'm being too harsh in my assessment of Zi Long.

"No, I should be saying that." She said as she bowed and smiled before she continued, "Well then, to make up for this morning's lessons, we've decided to have you take make-up lessons now."

Eh?

"I, I should be sleeping." I headed to my bed as I said so.

"No need for sleep." She pulled me away from the bed in one smooth move, and pushed me out of the room, "Sun Qian and the rest are waiting for you so go quickly. Ah, we will be training your swordsmanship as usual tonight as well."

Ah, perhaps I should apply for leave for myself.

As I was dragged off, I tried to force myself to catch whatever sleep I could.

Chapter 35: Intermission

Meng De POV

Da... *Da*... *Da*...

My horse swept up dust and dirt as I rode through the encampment we set up after the battle. As the smell of dirt and blood filled my nose, the scene of the harsh battle from before played itself again in my eyes.

The sudden arrival of the enemy, the ferocious, endless waves of cavalry, charging in over and over again into my exhausted troops.

Up till now, death throes could be heard all around me. I looked at the troops on either side, and saw that their faces were devoid of the confidence and pride they had when they had set off and they were now ashen-faced and covered in dirt with their eyes half-closed.

When some troops saw me, they tried to stand to salute and bow but they didn't have the strength to do so. When I saw this, I hurriedly gestured to them that they didn't need to do so, and wanted to give some words of encouragement but I couldn't find the words I ought to say.

Just then, the sound of horse hooves could be heard from behind me.

"Meng De." In the next instant, Yuan Rang appeared beside me. Her face and body were similarly covered in dirt and blood. She heaved and gasped as she held a piece of silk in her hands that was covered in words.

On her face, I couldn't see her usual fiery demeanor, nor did I hear her say anything about advancing the battle. All I could see was a forced show of strength.

"What is it?"

"The numbers are out." She said as she waved the piece of silk with a difficult expression.

I brought these troops out here myself so I know what the outcome is roughly speaking. But now that the exact numbers are out, I still have to listen to it and I can also see the variance between reality and my calculations.

"How is it?"

"Un..." Yuan Rang gave an uncharacteristic pause as she slowly opened the piece of silk, and read out from it disheartenedly, "For the expedition to Yi state, 100,000 troops have been drafted. As of now, 16,000 or so have been killed in action. Of the casualties, about half of them are warrant officers or officers. 5,000 or so are missing in action. Most of these disappearances occurred in the marshes near the battlefield, so these could have also been desertions. 11,000 or so have died from various diseases, with water quality and poisonous

insects being the primary causes. Additionally, 7,000 or so are injured or have contracted from disease and are unable to fight. About half of these are fatal and won't last past the month. In total, we have about 40,000 or so casualties. Most of them belong to the Ji, Yan and Qing states, and I'm afraid that there will be production shortfalls in these 3 states for the next few years."

After Yuan Rang finished, she tore up the piece of silk into tiny bits and threw them away.

It doesn't look like it on the surface, but Yuan Rang should be incensed inside. If this was the usual, I would have comforted her and sought to get her to let off some steam but I don't have the heart for it now.

After thinking for a moment, I decided to change the topic, "Yuan Rang, do we still have the chance to take Yi state city?"

"Un, the scouts have reported that Qiuliju has pulled back." Yuan Rang nodded as she said so but she still had a difficult expression, "Their troops are far fewer than ours after all."

(TL: Qiuliju is an Wuhuan general)

A victory attained by stacking human lives. This was probably what Yuan Rang wanted to say.

"... Yuan Rang, I'm sorry."

"Meng De, you don't need to apologise to me. I know this isn't your fault." She reached out and patted my shoulders. There was a fair bit of strength behind her patting and it made me feel like I was sinking, "I was just reflecting."

"Reflecting on?"

"Reflecting on the fact that I have not fought on the losing side many times and that is why I am so despondent now."

So that's what she was thinking about huh? Un, it does make sense.

"Speaking of which, Meng De, are you heading to..." Yuan Rang clearly knew where I was heading to and didn't continue.

I nodded, "Yes, they paid too high a price in this battle after all."

Yuan Rang and I came to a rather splendid tent and dismounted before handing our horses over to 2 soldiers at the side. I then steeled myself as I approached the curtains.

After I parted the curtains, I saw that there were 3 people inside, 1 was lying down while 2 were standing. The 2 who were standing had their backs to me so I couldn't tell what their status was immediately.

"May I ask if it's Lord Cao Cao?"

Of the 2, the one wearing plain clothing guessed who the visitor was, At this, I hurriedly saluted her wordlessly.

Her name was Yan Xiang, and she is Yuan Shu's number 1 strategist. She usually likes to comb her hair to the back in a weird style and doesn't speak much so we don't really have a lot of opportunities to interact. I can't see what she looks like now but from the bloodstains and dirt on her clothing, I can tell that she's been through a lot in this battle as well.

"Lord Cao Cao, the frontlines..."

Ji Ling on the other side turned, and when she confirmed it was me, she seemed nervous and hurriedly walked up to me and asked what the status was. Her plate armour was originally rather provocative to begin with but after this battle, a lot of it was gone and it was even more eye-catching, But at this time, no one would think of such things.

"Don't worry, Lord Ji Ling. We can conquer Yi state very soon." Yuan Rang took the initiative and replied her.

At this answer, Ji Ling seemed to be relieved as she sank to the ground onto her knees and closed her eyes and breathed out, "That's great, my lord's hard work wasn't wasted."

Yes, it wasn't a waste. The people of the Great Han must remember her, I said in my heart as I shifted my gaze to Yuan Shu who was lying on the bed, and looked with respect at this child who wasn't very old to begin with.

If Yuan Shu hadn't broken through the enemy's formation when they surrounded us, we would have been decimated.

"Ah..." Just then, Yuan Shu who had been lying on the bed quietly let out a soft cry. There was pain and difficulty in the cry, but she was indeed alive.

"My lord."

"My lord, you're awake!"

When they saw their lord awaken, Yan Xiang and Ji Ling rushed forward and knelt before Yuan Shu's bed and waited for her to open her eyes while Yuan Rang and I went forward as well.

"... Un... Th, this is..."

"My lord, this is the main tent."

"... The battle."

"The battle is already over, my lord." Yan Xiang said in a relieved voice, and after she finished, she repeated it again, "The battle is already over."

Yuan Shu sank into silence and only understood after a while, "The result?"

"We won, Lord Yuan Shu." Yuan Rang quickly said first, ahead of the other 2, as she was afraid they might say too much and agitate Yuan Shu.

"Huhuhu... That's great..." Surprisingly, Yuan Shu still laughed like how she usually did. Her laughter was so sweet, and carefree, and didn't seem any different from a normal child.

"Lord Yuan Shu, the merit for this battle is all yours." I said as I sat on Yuan Shu's bedside.

"Of course it is!" Yuan Shu exclaimed in a weak, but lively voice, and paused for moment before she continued, "But... Yan Xiang and Ji Ling did do a lot this time."

She acts strong the outside but she cares for her subordinates very much, just like her elder sister.

"My lord, it's been hard on you..." Yan Xiang lowered her head and said in a tearful voice.

"My lord!" Ji Ling on the other side couldn't say anything and only called out to Yuan Shu.

"What are you crying about, I'm not dead. Ah, Yan Xiang, what's with your eye..." Yuan Shu was still smiling and reached out to wipe Yan Xiang's tears when she found that she couldn't get up, or get off the bed, and retracted her hand, "I see, so that's why."

Her legs were gone. During the battle, a poison arrow hit her legs and to save her, they had to amputate both legs. For the same reason, Yan Xiang lost her eye to the stray poison from an arrow.

Yuan Shu was able to understand what happened immediately, and calmly accepted it which was very surprising to me.

At the same time, I was assailed by an undescribable guilt. It was as if Yuan Shu's pain was mine.

If I had worked harder, if I had been more diligent with my preparations, this probably wouldn't have happened.

At the same time, I felt like I owed Ben Chu now. How am I supposed to account for what happened to Yuan Shu after she left her to me? If she feels that there was a nefarious plot behind this, I can't blame her.

We have all paid far too high a price for this battle.

"Big sis! Big sis!" Just as I was drowning in my hurt, Ren's frantic cry from outside the tent could be heard.

Before I could turn and ask her why she came, she reported it directly, "Guo Feng Xiao isn't going to make it!"

Chapter 36: Don't tell me this intermission is the last chapter of volume 6

TL: I personally found this volume a little boring after the reunion but this chapter takes the cake. There's actually a 17-part extra for this volume but I'm skipping it as it's not very interesting and doesn't even have main storyline impacts unlike the rest I did.

Meng De POV

By the time I rushed over to where she was, Feng Xiao was lying on the ground peacefully with her eyes shut.

“Feng Xiao!” This scene gave me a fright, “Oi! Go and check what she’s like now!”

I hurriedly ordered the physician by her side to check her pulse at which that person anxiously went forward to do so.

“So Meng De’s here huh.”

“Ah!”

Feng Xiao suddenly spoke up just as the physician went up to her, which thoroughly scared the physician and knocked my feelings out of whack.

Hu... So she’s still alive.

“Don’t scare me like that, will you! That crime alone is enough for me to sentence you to death.”

“Kill me then.”

“Look at you now. I don’t even think there’s enough time to haul you off to the guillotine.”

I followed along with her jokes and jabs but the content hurt me deeply. I knew it eas a joke but I also knew that it was the truth.

I looked at Feng Xiao, who still had her eyes shut and didn’t seem to have any intention of opening them, “... You really can’t make it?”

“Un, probably.”

“... Can’t you just hold on for a few more years? At least wait until I die before you go.”

“That’s clearly impossible.”

As she said so, Feng Xiao gave a faint smile but fresh blood seeped out when she opened her mouth. I was used to this by now and calmly took out a handkerchief to wipe her mouth.

“No need to wipe it, you can’t wipe it clean anyway.”

“It’s the last time already. You should go in a clean state.” I said as I sighed, “It was really difficult on you. I even let you follow along on this expedition.”

“I wanted to come from the very beginning.” She said as she covered her mouth with her sleeve, “I also wanted to see how Meng De looks when she’s thoroughly thrashed.”

I can’t believe how vicious that mouth of hers is even until the very last moment,

“I haven’t been thrashed, Yi state city is within our grasp.”

“You think I can’t tell what’s going on from the back?”

Looks like I can’t hide it from her.

“... I’m sorry, I wasted all your efforts.”

“Yes, I, Guo Feng Xiao, outsmarted an innumerable number of people in my life but I never imagined that I would fall so badly in my final battle. Looks like I’ll be laughed at by the world.”

Even though I knew she couldn’t see it, I still shook her head at these words.

“Feng Xiao has an uncanny foresight and is a genius at commanding and managing troops. How could the world laugh at you?” I couldn’t help but get agitated as I said so, and reached out to grab Feng Xiao’s cold, thin hand, “If anything, I, Cao Meng De, will be spat at by the world.”



"Kekeke," Feng Xiao gave her usual provocative laughter and applied strength into her grip on my hand.

"Things are ever-changing in this world so sometimes you win, others you lose. Losing this battle doesn't mean that you have lost the war, nor does it mean that you, Cao Meng De, have failed... Ah!" Feng Xiao gasped a couple of times with difficulty as she said so and only continued after her breathing normalised again, "This pyrrhic win is to let my lord understand that my lord's path is difficult beyond imagination. On the outside, you have the Man, Yi, Rong, Di barbarians surrounding us, and on the inside you have feudal lords who oppose your rule. My lord is not a just lord either as seizing the Son of Heaven to control the feudal lords

is not a just route. Until the day you achieve absolute victory, my lord must always bear the cross as one who is known as an evil and treacherous person, and must endure the resulting condemnation and criticism of various people. Even after hundreds and thousands of years after my lord's passing, no one will step up to clear your name. Should you happen to fail, your name will be recorded in history for your mistakes and that will be all that you will be known for. Dare I ask, even so, is my lord ready? Even if I'm not around, can my lord face all this?"

Feng Xiao's words all hit very close to home, and as she continued on, I could feel her applying more strength into her grip. At the same time, I could also feel her powerlessness and weakness.

The reason why she is using the last of her strength to revisit what she has mentioned before is probably because she wants to reconfirm my answer once more.

If it was how things were like usually, I would have replied immediately and resolutely. But at this moment, I was feeling a little lost because of Feng Xiao's impending passing.

If I lose Feng Xiao, won't I have walk down this arduous and thankless path alone?

I sank into thought while Feng Xiao waited for my final answer with her eyes closed.

"... I won't stop what I've started." I don't know if it's out of sorrow or excitement, but my nose began to burn and I felt hot all over. I raised my head and looked to the heavens and yelled out the words which reflected what I truly felt from the bottom of my heart, "I'd rather let the world betray me— Than betray the world!"

"Is that so." Feng Xiao replied, and took a few gasps before she continued, "Since my lord has not forgotten how she felt in the very beginning, I won't repeat my words. But before I leave, I still have some words to leave to my lord."

"I am listening." I said as I bent forward to hear Feng Xiao's last words.

"In the north, apart from the Wuhuan, there is Gongsun Kang and their allies. Speed is of the essence in the art of war so I strongly recommend my lord to push forward with everything and take down Yi city and Liu city before going after Gongsun Kang which will allow my lord to finally unify the north." Feng Xiao said and paused for a long while after that. I didn't dare to interrupt and waited until she continued, "The north's reunification is only a matter of time. After that is done, I suggest my lord to take Jing state and the other lands before attacking Hanzhong, and then driving off Liu Zhang and conquering Yi state. This will allow you to surround both Xiliang and Jiangdong, and eventually take down both, thereby unifying the Central Plains. Lastly, Liu Bei Liu Xuan De will be your nemesis in future. Be it for personal or official reasons, you must not show him mercy or any quarter or he will eventually get in the way of my lord's ambitions to unify the world."

(TL: The Yi state they are at currently is 易. The one Feng Xiao mentioned later on is 益.)

"... Un." To be honest, this reply wasn't very resolute. And the reason was because of Liu

Bei. Even though I understand where she's coming from, I am unwilling to promise to ruthlessly pursue Xuan De. I still harbour hope that there are other ways out for Xuan De besides what Feng Xiao described.

"My lord!" Feng Xiao seemed to read what I was thinking and raised her volume, "My lord! Please promise me! You must not show mercy- *Ke* *Ke* *Ke*!"

"Feng Xiao."

Feng Xiao coughed up so much blood her clothing was dyed red before she could finish.

"... Un, I promise." With such a scene before me, I couldn't do anything else and hurriedly promised her.

When she heard this, Feng Xiao, who was by now pale as a sheet, nodded slightly. She then began to speak again but I couldn't hear what she was saying and hurriedly moved my ear to her mouth.

"My position... Xun Yu or Cheng Yu can take it. Jia Xu is an extraordinary talent and you should use her. Man Chong, Chen Qun and the rest are accomplished administrative officials and warrior generals in their own right and should be used as well. As for the future, I hope that my lord looks out for herself..."

She repeated this several times while I nodded as I held back my tears. Only when Feng Xiao stopped speaking did I stop nodding and allowed myself to cry.

This is the 2nd time after Dian Wei.

After I gathered my feelings together and left Feng Xiao's body, the 2 attendants at my side took a piece of white cloth and covered Feng Xiao's peaceful resting face with it.

I didn't feel good about this but I had neither reason nor the will to stop what I was seeing before me.

I am Cao Cao, and I have promised Feng Xiao to continue down this path.

"Cheng Yu, Xun Yu, are you 2 around?"

"... My lord."

"... Imperial Chancellor."

As I predicted, these 2 were beside me. At times like these, I feel that having these 2 around me is not something horrifying but something heartwarming instead,

"I've always troubled you both with scouting and spying missions." I sighed to strengthen my resolve and continued, "From today onwards, you can shed these black clothes."

“... What does my lord have in mind?”

“... What are my lord’s plans now that Feng Xiao has left us?”

You both already know, I laughed inside.

“You’re both about the same age as me while Feng Xiao is the youngest amongst all of us. I was still hoping that I could hand things over to her after I unified the world but who knew that she would meet her end while I’m not even halfway done. Perhaps this is fate.” I said, and spread open my arms. I felt a gust of wind on both sides, which meant that these 2 have shown themselves, and continued, “I’ll be counting on you both in future for my ambitions.”

As I finished, I turned and bowed.

While my head was lowered, the words from before filled my head again.

Liu Bei Liu Xuan De, no matter what, it looks like we’ll meet on the battlefield one day.

At this, I still feel the same: I await that day. But before that, is it too ludicrous of me to hope that I can chat with you again?

Take care of yourself, I said inside to Xuan De who was in some distant corner of the world.

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Afterword

Hello everyone, this is where the 6th volume will end. Does everyone have the feeling that 'The story hasn't come to the end of a stage but this guy is still forcing an ending'? At this, I can only say that the word count for this volume is off the charts so I'll just end this volume with the passing of Guo Jia.

Personally speaking, I was actually planning to end the 6th volume when the Jiangdong chapter ends but it looks like I still have a fair bit to write about with Jiangdong which I'll continue in the 7th volume. At this point, I'll reveal that there are more people who transferred to this era in the story besides the MC, and some of the earlier changes to the original/historical version will have significant impacts on major events later on. I won't talk about the details for now but if anyone has any thoughts or wants to guess how the plot goes, I invite you to write something like a doujin for this story to help fill in the gaps between plot events.

As always, I'm very grateful. I'm grateful to all my readers who have stuck with me till the 6th volume, grateful to 小灰, 冥想, sum etc, who have contributed to such beautiful illustrations and character designs for my lousy work. I don't really have manuscripts and my update times are not fixed but I am willing to continue with this. I still have 3 years to graduate after all.

Also, a forecast for the next volume. In the 7th volume, I plan to write 2 parts. One will be about Jiangdong, and the other will be about Jing state. When the time comes, some people in Jing state and some other people will show themselves. If possible, I hope that the 7th volume can answer a lot of queries. Additionally, I will also keep up the practice of inserting intermissions to tell the story on Cao Meng De's side, which will primarily cover the advancement of various administrative officials and warrior generals after Guo Jia's passing. I also plan to let some fellows who are actually very cool in history but were unremarkable or did not appear in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms some nice appearances so please await that.

Gradually, this story will become more serious so I hope everyone can accept that. By the way, at this point in the story, Yi state has already begun to move, does everyone know? At least, that's how it is in my story.

In any case, I hope everyone can continue reading. Though my schedule isn't fixed for now, I will still try my best. I hope that everyone can continue to support me and my story in future as well. I am grateful to everyone onz

Let's meet again in the 7th volume.

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